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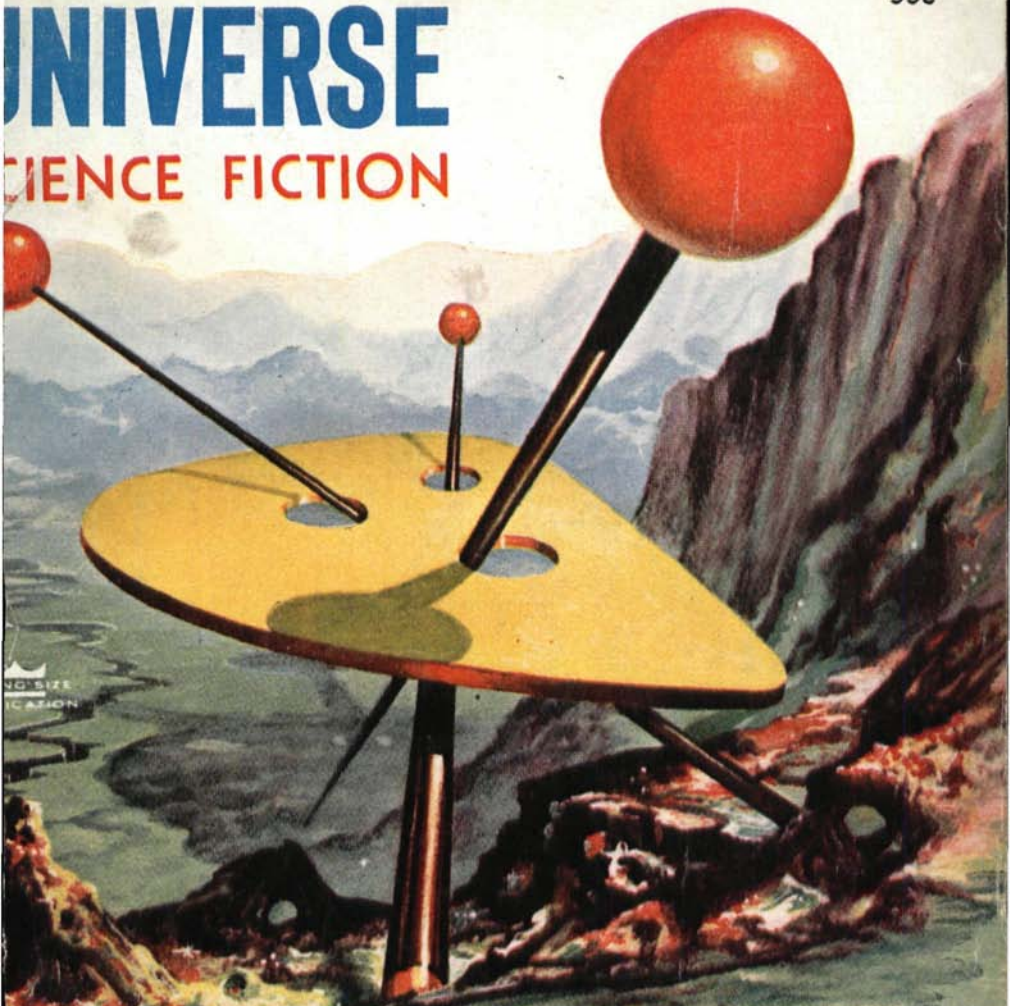

FEATURING TWO STARTLING NOVELETS

THE END OF THE JOURNEY by Edmund Cooper

PASSAGE TO ANYWHERE by Sam Merwin Jr.

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THE STORY BEHIND THE COVER . . .

YOU CAN'T SEE THEM, OF COURSE. But close to the summit of that coral-bright plateau in the middle foreground four human explorers are crouching.

They are weary and discouraged, and they would give a rousing cheer if you were to come striding toward them with some fresh tobacco, and a winning smile, and greetings from the folks back home. But you can't salute them with amiable aplomb because you're seven thousand light years away, across the great curve of the universe.

But perhaps you can tune in on their conversation. We've set up a one-way communications system for you that operates on a cosmic frequency that might surprise you. We can't be sure, of course, that you'll hear anything. But if you'll be patient for a moment or two—

Hold on—listen! You may not have to wait at all. We've picked up something. Perhaps it's just a static hum, but it could be a voice sound blurred by a wild sea's tumultuous pounding.

Yes, here it comes. It's clear now, as clear and sharp as it will ever be. *Listen.*

"Fred, I don't like it."

"What don't you like?"

"The *look* of that machine."

"Kid, that machine has probably been standing there for fifty million years. How could a machine that old be dangerous to us? How could it be dangerous at this particular instant in Time? Consider the law of averages, the eternity factor, the height and depth of the universe—"

"The kid's right. Stop talking like a drunken-pup Socrates."

"A drunken pup would have more sense. A fifty-million-year-old machine doesn't have to stop functioning. We could still be in deadly danger. It's complex and tremendous, but have you noticed how closely it resembles a sun dial? Perhaps it was designed to draw energies from this system's *five* first magnitude suns. And five suns could really throw their weight around."

"Lacey! The next time you jump like that—"

"It just moved! I saw it!"

"You're crazy!"

"No, he's right. It *is* moving. *It's coming straight toward us!*"

Static again. We can't seem to— Screams? No, no, it was just static. If you start getting ideas we'll be sorry we set up the transmitter for you in the first place. After all, a cover illustration should simply accelerate your stride a little and enable you to keep in step with the many unusual stories in FANTASTIC UNIVERSE.

FRANK BELKNAP LONG

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By RICHARD JOHNS

Yes! *You, yourself can fit this* amazing GASOLINE ATOMIZER onto your car in as little as 20 easy minutes! *And it's guaranteed to pay you back your full purchase price, in gas savings alone, in the first 3 to 4 months that you use it. Here's why!*

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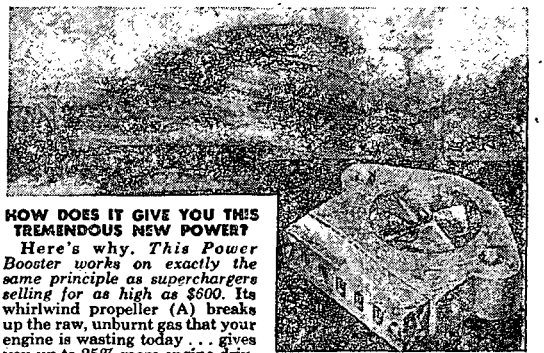
Before that other car has even crossed the street, you will have caught up with him. For one brief second, you and that other car will race fender to fender. And then you will flash away from him . . . you will leave him a full block behind . . . *you will look in your rear view mirror and see the startled look of amazement in the other driver's eyes!*

TEST THIS NEW POWER 100 DIFFERENT WAYS!

But that's just the beginning! Test this equipment at our risk for one full month! Use it to flash away from other cars . . . speed up the steepest hills! See the *enormous gas savings* it gives you! Feel the life-saving *reserve power* it gives you at 50-60-70 miles an hour! Prove to yourself that it *actually pays back its full cost, in gas savings alone, during the first three or four months — OR YOUR FULL MONEY BACK!*



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Here's why. This Power Booster works on exactly the same principle as superchargers selling for as high as $600. Its whirlwind propeller (A) breaks up the raw, unburnt gas that your engine is wasting today . . . gives you up to 25% more engine-driving power from every drop! Its emergency breather valve (B) forces that engine to breath deeper . . . push harder . . . pile up more mileage from every gallon you buy! It gives you a TREMENDOUS NEW BURST OF MONEY-SAVING POWER when you need it most — when you flash away from traffic . . . shoot up steep hills . . . pick up speed on the highway! No wonder dozens of leading car magazines call this the "money-saving discovery of the year."

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FANTASTIC UNIVERSE, Vol. 5, No. 1. Published monthly by KING-SIZE PUBLICATIONS, INC., 471 Park Avenue, New York 22, N. Y. Subscription, 12 issues $3.75, single copies 35¢. Foreign postage extra. Reentered as second-class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y.
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Paul Harvey Hails New Way For Deaf To Hear Clearly Again

NEW YORK CITY (Special)—A sensational new discovery in the miracle science of electronics that helps the hard-of-hearing hear clearly again was hailed by Paul Harvey, famous news commentator, on his American Broadcasting Co. broadcast Sunday night.

Harvey revealed that this new discovery helps even those suffering a severe hearing loss to hear again with unbelievable clearness. It is so revolutionary it makes vacuum-tube hearing aids obsolete. Nothing shows in the ear except a tiny, almost invisible device.

"This new invention changes the lives of the hard-of-hearing overnight," Harvey said. "I've seen it happen to someone I know intimately."

Harvey urged his listeners to find out how this amazing discovery can bring new happiness and success to their loved ones who need better hearing.

To acquaint readers of this magazine with this new way to hear clearly again, a fascinating book with complete facts will be sent free, in a plain wrapper. No cost or obligation. Send your request on a postcard to Electronic Research Director, Dept. LHZ, Beltone Hearing Aid Co., 400 Madison Avenue, New York 17, New York.

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the end of the journey

by . . . Edmund Cooper

Even so brave a man as Captain Mauris knew there was much to fear in a journey to a star. But stern indeed is a spaceman's code.

Motion does not tire anybody. With the earth as our vehicle we are traveling at 20 miles a second round the sun; the sun carries us at 12 miles a second through the galactic system; the galactic system bears us at 250 miles a second amid the spiral nebulae . . . If motion could tire, we ought to be dead tired.

Sir Arthur Eddington
THE NATURE OF THE PHYSICAL WORLD

IT WAS twenty hours, ship's time, after firing point. A million miles astern, the earth shone coldly like a small green moon. On the navigation deck of the *Santa Maria*, a profound silence was disturbed only by the steady but discreet ping of the radio probe.

Captain Mauris leaned back on his contour-berth and waited patiently for his soul to catch up with his body. His sensations at the beginning of each deep voyage were invariably the same. His body had learned to adapt to a force of 10 G and to a stellar acceleration whose graph was a mad ascending curve.

Somehow we've always thought of the Atlantic Ocean as a bridge with a very shining curvature. Perhaps that's why we become uncommonly elated when we can introduce to our readers a new young writer of talent from the British Isles. Edmund Cooper lives where the Union Jack waves proudly over five centuries of seafaring valor, which may explain his preference for a "seafaring" audacity in dealing with interplanetary themes. Mr. Cooper is also addicted to chess and psychiatry, but he is happily married notwithstanding.

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But his spirit, while hardly weak, retained the old subconscious reluctance. It didn't much care for the big jump. It would hang tenaciously on to the illusion that Captain Mauris would presently wake up to find himself at home in bed.

He rarely did; because, more often than not, the dream became the reality. Recently he had calculated that he had slept on Earth not more than nine thousand times in his life, whereas he had voyaged among the stars for nearly twice that number of Earth-nights. It was the sort of calculation that he did not care to remember—which was principally why he could not forget it.

Which *was* the dream—Earth or space? After twenty hours of space-flight in planetary drive—which nowadays the younger men humorously called first gear—Captain Mauris was not too sure of the answer. He had long ago ceased to have physical space-sickness, but he had never lost the spiritual variety. And lately it had seemed to intensify. Perhaps he was just getting old. Perhaps he really would make this the last trip . . .

The captain sighed, and took refuge in the monumental assumption of Descartes: *I think, therefore I exist*. He began to wonder if the same could be said of his boatload of physicists. With a sardonic smile, Captain Mauris decided that he had seen terrestrial positronic robots which could lay a greater claim to individuality.

Ever since the dim distant days of the twentieth century, when the scientific caste system had been formalized, physicists had tended to become less and less human. Now they were hardly more than semi-substantial extrapolations of their own theories.

They were a race apart. Watching them board the *Santa Maria,* listening to their conversation, Captain Mauris had actually wondered whether they might not be the new type *omega* robots which, according to rumor, were now past the experimental stage. But he had seen two of them playing chess so badly, and a third so delightfully green with space-sickness, that he had regretfully concluded that they were human. Even *sigma* robots played chess excellently; and clearly there was no reason why the robot engineers should endow their offspring with uncontrollable nervous systems.

The physicists, then, were unfortunately human—a sad comment on the sort of civilization that allowed robots to take charge of global production, while turning the best human brains into second-rate electronic calculators.

The captain's private soliloquy was interrupted by Phylo, the first officer, climbing down from the astrodome.

"Dead on," said Phylo. "Heading straight for *Zeta* of the Great Bear. When do we change gear, Captain?"

Captain Mauris gave him a sour

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look. "While I command the *Santa Maria,* Mr. Phylo, we will not change gear."

"Sorry, sir. When do we use the stellar drive, then?"

"I think," replied the captain, "that I will shortly inquire if the physicists are still alive, and if so, when they will be prepared to take the bump."

Phylo laughed. "I hope you're disappointed, sir."

"Meaning what?"

"I hope they're still kicking. I should hate to have to return to Earth and explain why we knocked off six top S.F.P.'s."

"The world," said Captain Mauris soberly, "might even smell somewhat sweeter for the loss of a few space-frame physicists. Man is becoming just a little too clever."

"I wonder why you volunteered for the trip, then," said Phylo slyly. "A voyage with S.F.P. men for unspecified experimental purposes hardly promises to be uneventful. Besides, there's the triple danger money—just like the old days when they first tried out the stellar drive."

"Of the few parts of the world that remain unspoiled by civilization, the Amazonian hinterland is the most attractive—for me," said Captain Mauris obliquely. "One of these days, Phylo, I shall buy myself ten thousand acres in the middle of nowhere. And then, the only time I shall ever take my feet off terra firma will be when I climb into my hammock. The reason I signed on as Master of the *Santa Maria* is quite simple. It represents almost five thousand acres."

"If," said Phylo drily, "we survive whatever tricks the S.F.P.'s are cooking up."

"Exactly," said Captain Mauris. "But it is my firm intention to survive."

Phylo gazed through the plastiglass anti-glare dome at a swarm of hard, unwinking suns. Finally, without looking at Mauris, he said softly, "I think there's also another reason, sir."

"Do you, now!" The captain's tone was not encouraging.

Phylo took a deep breath and ploughed on. "They told me back at base that you were the first skipper to successfully use the stellar drive."

"A slight exaggeration," said Mauris with a cold smile. "I was merely the first captain to return and collect his pay envelope. However, proceed."

"I notice," said Phylo uneasily, "that there's a parallel set of gears —I mean dual controls—on the main panel."

"Well?"

"I don't understand the calibrations on the dials under the lightometer. Nor do I understand why the second bank of meters should have all their throw-in switches locked and sealed."

"An interesting little mystery," observed the captain noncommittally. "As you have obviously given some thought to it, what conclusion do *you* draw?"

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"Well, sir," said Phylo hesitantly, "bearing in mind that the *Santa Maria* has a cargo of S.F.P.'s, a skipper who successfully tested the stellar drive, a set of new instruments, and the fact that we are under sealed orders, I think there's only one possible conclusion."

"I should be interested to hear it," said Captain Mauris.

"There have been rumors," continued Phylo, "of a galactic drive. My guess is that the *Santa Maria* has been fitted out for a trial run. What do you think, sir?"

"I think," replied Captain Mauris, glancing at the bulkhead electrochron, "that I shall shortly break the seal and discover what the Fates have in store for us. I'll tell you this, though—I don't think we shall be experimenting with a galactic drive."

"Why not, sir?"

"Because," said Captain Mauris with a thin smile, "the United Space Corporation has already developed it—as a logical extension of the stellar drive."

Phylo gazed at him in sheer amazement. "It's the first I've heard of it, sir."

"I know," said Mauris imperturbably. "It's still on the secret list. But as I traveled as a paid observer on the test jump, I can definitely assure you that the galactic drive is a fact."

Phylo's voice was filled with awe. "Would it be indiscreet to inquire what distance you logged?"

"Not now," said the captain. "I think—in view of our position—that it will do no harm to give you the facts. We—er—had a little jaunt round *Beta Centauri.*"

"*Beta Centauri!* Sir, I never would have—"

"A matter of seven hundred light-years for the round trip," added Mauris complacently.

"How long did it take?" demanded Phylo incredulously.

The captain permitted a note of pride to enter his voice. "Three hours, twenty-seven minutes, ship's time—starting and finishing in the neighborhood of Pluto's orbit."

"Were there any—any casualties?"

"All of us," said Captain Mauris soberly. "We couldn't stop laughing for two days. But I forgot. There was one serious casualty: Egon, the navigator. His star maps were damn near useless, of course. He swore we'd never get home. And when we finally hit the System, the relief was too much for him. He was the only one who didn't stop laughing. And from what I hear, he's still enjoying himself."

Phylo couldn't make up his mind whether or not Captain Mauris was having a private joke. After a moment or two, he said in a matter-of-fact voice, "I wonder what the hell is going to happen on this trip, then?"

"Probably," said Captain Mauris "we shall cease to exist."

II

FOUR hours later, in the privacy

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of his cabin, the captain of the *Santa Maria* broke the seal on a slim envelope and read his instructions. He skipped impatiently through the conventional wording until he came to the part that mattered. He went through it carefully, word for word, three times. The final paragraph gave him a certain grim amusement. He read it again:

While the normal articles of space-travel obtain for this experimental voyage, there must of necessity be a fluid definition of the Safety Clause. Clearly the primary responsibility of the Master for the safety of his ship and all personnel must be to some extent subordinated by the actual programme sanctioned by the Field Testing Executive of the United Space Corporation. It is not implied, however, that the prerogative of Master's Discretion will inevitably be superseded by test requirements. If the Master should satisfy himself, and the authorized scientists concerned, that the danger factor is sufficient to render the ship's safe return as improbable, therefore neutralizing the validity of the experiment, he is entitled to cancel the test programme and return immediately to base. A Court of Inquiry will then evaluate the circumstances leading to such a decision. It is, however, earnestly hoped that scientific and ship personnel will so co-operate as to bring both the experiment and the voyage to a successful conclusion.

"Why the devil," said Captain Mauris to himself, "do they use a lot of big words to tell me that I'm merely acting wet-nurse for a bunch of S.F.P.'s? *If the Master should satisfy himself, and the authorized scientists concerned . . .* Very funny! The whole idea is not less than one hundred percent suicidal; and then they talk about a sufficient danger factor!"

There was a knock at the door.

"Come in," called Mauris.

It was Kobler, chief of the S.F.P. team. He was a thin pasty-faced man of perhaps forty. His mouth looked as if it would split if he tried to smile.

Mauris motioned him into a chair, and reached for two glasses and the decanter. As he poured the drinks, Kobler glanced at the ship's articles lying on the desk.

"I see you have been studying the scriptures," said the physicist.

"I was merely trying to find out," explained Captain Mauris equably, "what authority, if any, I possess—in case of an emergency."

"And have you found out?" inquired Kobler, sipping his whiskey.

"Yes."

"Are you satisfied?"

"No. From the point of view of getting a clear-cut definition, it's as woolly as hell."

"I shouldn't worry, if I were you," said Kobler pleasantly. "If anything goes wrong, you'll probably have a megasecond in which to think a last beautiful thought."

"That," retorted Mauris thinly,

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"is why I would have liked sufficient power to over-rule you people —just in case I happened to anticipate the hypothetically fatal megasecond."

"Sorry," said Kobler, "but I'm the boss-man. That's the way it has to be for this sort of thing. You'd better resign yourself to praying for my spiritual guidance."

"I don't know why you people need a space-captain," said Mauris testily. "You could have programmed the *Santa Maria* to take you to dissolution point under her own steam."

Kobler smiled, and his face didn't crack. "You may not believe it," he said ironically, "but we space-frame gentry have nice orderly minds. We're very conventional really. Besides, even a space-captain has his uses. Incidentally, how did you enjoy the hop round *Beta Centauri?*"

"So that was why they wanted me to go," said Mauris. "I wondered about it."

"You were lucky," said Kobler. "They wouldn't let me go because some idiot mathematician suggested that the ship might surface too near a sun, or something damn silly like that. It seems that my brain was considered too valuable to be fried."

"Mine evidently wasn't," observed the captain.

"You, my friend, are unique," said Kobler drily. "You are a veteran of the stellar drive and the galactic jump. We regard you as a curio, a kind of talisman."

"I am flattered," said Captain Mauris. "And now, I think, we had better discuss ways and means."

"You know the destination?" asked Kobler.

The captain inclined his head towards the papers on the desk. "According to the *Field Testing Executive,*" he said calmly, "it is *Messier 81.*"

"What do you think of it?" asked Kobler smugly.

"I think it might be—interesting," said Captain Mauris with sarcasm. "I don't think I've ever visited a spiral nebula before."

Kobler grinned. "One million six hundred thousand light years," he said. "Quite a little hop when you come to think of it."

"How long do you think it will take?"

The physicist's grin broadened. "I don't know," he said happily. "Probably just that hypothetically fatal megasecond."

Mauris restrained himself with an effort. "I'd appreciate a brief exposition of the theory," he said. "It might be useful."

Kobler helped himself to more whiskey, leaned back in his chair and regarded the ceiling. "Essentially," he began, "it involves my private theory of matter, which also involves the stress characteristic of space and the so-called temporal regression."

"Proceed," said Mauris. "For a

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moment, I thought you were going to get complicated."

Kobler ignored him. "You understand, of course," he continued, "that matter is a form of locked-up energy?"

"Yes."

"Good. I now have news for you. Energy is simply a form of locked-up space. There is, from the physicist's point of view, quite a reasonable amount of energy in the cosmos: there is also the devil of a lot of space. Now there is, as well, the curious phenomenon of the expansion and unwrinkling of space alongside the actual diminution of energy."

"You wouldn't be throwing overboard the first and second laws of thermodynamics, would you?" interrupted the captain mildly.

Kobler admired his own fingernails complacently. "Child's play," he said. "Entropy and the first and second laws are all washed up. Funny thing, when I was a student I instinctively knew there was something wrong . . . But back to the point. I have established a definite coefficient—the practical application of which means, my friend, that we too can adopt the charming habit of energy. We can *submerge* in space. Just as energy, when it thinks nobody is looking, opens a little door into the fifth dimension and smartly side-steps all detection by *becoming* space, so we can play the same trick. Only we can go one better: we can become energy again. Which, in effect, means that we can knock the mainspring out of time.

"You see, Captain Mauris, by becoming virtually non-existent, we escape the temporal regression. That, in a simpler fashion, is why you were able to hop round *Beta Centauri* and swallow seven hundred light-years. And of the three hours twenty-seven minutes it took, you spent most of the time surfacing so that Egon could panic over his star maps."

"That is true," said Mauris. "But—if you will forgive a simple space-captain for pointing out the obvious—we were functioning in a known energy system. By making the new target M eighty-one, you are postulating a jump clean out of the local energy pattern."

"Not *out* of, but *through*," corrected the physicist. "On the *Beta Centauri* trip you were still slightly limited by a temporal regression. This time, the deceleration will be so sharp as to make a total break-through. We shall make a neat hole in our own space frame and enter sub-space. We shall become a pattern of space on the frame of sub-space. Then we shall localize our return break-through when a pretty little instrument that I have programmed for M eighty-one recognizes the surface energy pattern."

"Suppose the programming fails."

Kobler laughed. "As it is the first true cosmometer, there is the possibility. But you can take it from me that it is theoretically perfect."

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Captain Mauris thought nostalgically of the Amazonian hinterland. After nearly a minute's silence, he said, "It's nice to feel that somebody's confident, anyway."

"Space has a very definite direction," pursued Kobler. "Its vortices are the galactic leaks. In some respects, we can regard the sub-echoes of nebulae as stepping-stones. In the extra-galactic jump, it's chiefly a question of defining the direction/deceleration crisis — or, in plain language, of making the right hole at the right time."

"I expect you'll want to clear the System before the—er—experiment begins," ventured Mauris.

"Naturally," said Kobler. "By the way, would you like me to tell the crew what it's all about?" He looked slightly worried.

"I was going to suggest a brief lecture," replied Mauris. "But since you have explained the background to me so lucidly, I think I might save you that little job. I'll tell them we're going to make a nice little hole in the balloon of space and pop up again sixteen hundred thousand light-years away. That should make for some interesting discussion."

"You think they'll panic?"

The captain shook his head. "They'll just laugh politely, and think I'm getting too old for the job."

"So far as I can see," said Kobler, downing the remainder of his whiskey, "everything is predictable—except the human reaction."

"It makes for a nice philosophical problem," observed Mauris.

"What does?"

"Whether or not we can be conscious of our own non-existence."

Kobler gave him a look of respect. "That's the crux of the matter," he admitted. "You see, the *Santa Maria* and all aboard will cease to be a system of molecular organizations."

"Conversely," said the captain in a matter-of-fact voice, "it will become the abstract memory of an energy pattern which will be resynthesized out of space—when and if your infallible cosmometer correlates the pattern of M eighty-one with that of its own environment."

Kobler sat up. "I didn't know you were a physicist."

"I'm not," retorted Mauris drily. "But I'll tell you something else, too. It's going to be damn cold!"

III

PLUTO'S orbit was a hundred million miles astern, and the *Santa Maria* had achieved a satisfactory clearance of the System. For the last ten hours, she had voyaged under her stellar drive. Through the dark plastiglass portholes, men occasionally stared at the long star-torn silence of total night.

The navigation deck was a scene of activity and tension, for deceleration point was rapidly approaching. A fat copper cylinder had been battened to the deck in front of the

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main control panel; and the second bank of switches, with their mysterious calibrations, had now been unsealed. Kobler had lovingly supervised the installation of his cosmometer, and was now displaying sufficient humanity to fuss about it much as an anxious father nursing his first-born.

Phylo, the first officer, was surreptitiously biting his nails. He was definitely unhappy. His appreciation of the science of physics being rather more limited than usual for one in his position, he had come to believe simply that the approaching experiment was merely the most elaborate method yet invented of committing suicide.

Of all the personnel of the *Santa Maria,* Captain Mauris was the most calm. He was very busy breaking several regulations. He lay on his master's contour-berth and watched all the extra berths that were needed by the physicists being bolted down. Kobler had decided, after much consultation, that the entire S.F.P. team should foregather on the navigation deck for the experiment. Half a dozen extra berths had then been hastily erected, giving the impression of a surrealist hospital.

Normally, Captain Mauris would have regarded the invasion with frigid resentment. But now he watched the proceedings with a benevolent air.

It was his duty as Master of the ship to present at all times an aspect of confidence. With the aid of a bottle of Scotch and a somewhat prehistoric corncob pipe, he was fulfilling this obligation admirably. He was also sweating, for he had discarded his uniform jacket in favor of two old polo-necked jerseys. Doubtless the *Field Testing Executive* would strongly disapprove of his unconventional approach, but then the F.T.E. were millions of miles away.

Having taken what he considered to be a sufficiency of spirit, the captain was now engaged in chewing glucose tablets. Phylo watched him with silent awe.

Eventually, Kobler looked up from his cosmometer. "Nine minutes to go, Captain," he said formally.

Mauris glanced at the bulkhead electrochron and nodded. "Five hundred seconds," he said pleasantly, "and then sixteen hundred thousand light-years. Science is quite wonderful."

Kobler was nettled. "What are you eating—nerve pills?"

"Glucose," said Mauris affably. "I've been dieting on whiskey and glucose."

"Why?"

"Because," explained Mauris, "I intend to keep both warm and energetic."

"There should not be any drop in temperature," said Kobler. "In any case, the thermostat will fix it."

"The non-existent thermostat," corrected Mauris gently. "But I was not thinking of coldness that can be measured in degrees centigrade."

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"There is no other," said Kobler authoritatively. "Neither is there any need to keep your strength up. There will be no fatigue."

"Nor was I thinking of physical fatigue."

Kobler shrugged. "Every man to his own superstitions," he said.

Captain Mauris smiled. "Would it be indiscreet to suggest that yours are non-Euclidean?"

Kobler turned away in disgust and spoke to one of his aides. "Get everyone in their contour-berths and switch the auto-announcer on. We might as well let the brain take over."

Captain Mauris made a last attempt to be helpful.

"It is well known," he said placidly, "that smooth motion never made anybody tired. But I am not so sure about smooth stillness. It may be very fatiguing. Perhaps it may even be possible for a non-existent man to be too tired to maintain his non-existent bodily heat. Would you care for some glucose?"

Kobler did not turn round, but his shoulders shook convulsively. Captain Mauris interpreted the movement as one of silent laughter.

"One minute to deceleration-point," boomed the auto-announcer.

Men with strained faces lay strapped on their contour-berths awaiting the indefinable shock of total stillness. They stared with unseeing eyes at their neighbors, the bulkhead, and the fat ominous copper cylinder. Phylo's lips were quivering. Captain Mauris, in spite of his light-hearted precautions, felt a strange icy finger probing his heart and even Kobler's massive confidence wavered as the critical moment drew near.

"Forty-five seconds," said that damnably calm automatic voice. "Thirty seconds . . . fifteen seconds . . . ten, nine, eight, seven, six, five, four, three, two, one—*zero!*"

And then there was nothing—no lurch, no pressure, no sudden stress. Only a great vacancy, a sensation of utter darkness, and a sharp instantaneous dream of unbeing. And then only the bare memory of the dream.

In the dimensions of physical space, the *Santa Maria* and all aboard her had ceased to exist. Where, before, a tiny metallic capsule—a caravel of explorers—had surged out from the dust-like brood of planets circling one of innumerable suns, there was now nothing.

The track of a strange silver bullet, coursing at a fantastic speed that was yet a mere snail's pace through the long deserts of the home galaxy, had stopped suddenly. There was no wreckage: there were no survivors. For what had existed in the apparent reality of space-time was now as if it had never been . . .

Captain Mauris was alone. He was alone because there was nothing else. He was alone with the illusion of his own existence. The stillness had settled like a slow inward frost.

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His premonition was justified. In a vacancy of non-sensation, there was yet the overwhelming weight of a curious fatigue. It was as if, at the moment of deceleration, the material cosmos had suddenly become too tired to hold together. As if Mauris himself must support the tiredness of a phantom universe.

"So this is what it's like to be dead," he mumbled in a sleepy voice. He was surprised. He was pulled up with a sickening jolt. He had heard his own voice, reverberating as in an empty room.

The voice that followed was less of a shock than this disturbing mockery of survival. "Captain Mauris! Captain Mauris! Soon you will be too tired to be dead, too cold to be an illusion. For you are condemned to be reborn."

It was a woman's voice, low, musical; drifting without urgency through the deep canyons of unbeing.

Mauris listened, appalled. It was a voice he recognized, the voice of a woman he might have married: a familiar voice, belonging to one he had never known.

"Who are you?" he called desperately, hearing the words echo on a wall of blackness.

There was laughter tumbling through the emptiness of stars.

"Mary Smith," said the voice, "Betty Jones and Margaret White. Marie-Antoinette, Cleopatra, Helen of Troy."

"I am mad!" cried Captain Mauris. "The stars are dark, and still there is something left to dream."

"You are unborn," said the voice gently. "Have patience."

Captain Mauris tried to move and could not. There was nothing to move, no location to be changed.

"Who am I?" he shouted wildly.

"Captain Mauris."

"There is no Captain Mauris," he protested savagely. "He is unborn, therefore he has never lived!"

"You are learning," came the answer, softly. "You are learning that it is necessary to wait."

"Who am I?" he demanded urgently.

The laughter came like an invisible tide, sweeping him on its crest.

"Punchinello," said the voice gaily, "Prometheus, Simple Simon, Alexander the Great."

"Who am I?" he called insistently.

"You are no one . . . Who knows? Perhaps you will become the first man. Perhaps you are waiting to be Adam."

"Then you are—"

Again the dark surge of laughter.

"I am the echo of a rib that has yet to sing."

"The rib is nowhere," said Mauris, drowsy with the effort of words. "It belongs to me, and I am unborn . . . Nowhere."

"Limbo," whispered the voice.

"Nowhere," mumbled Mauris.

"Limbo," insisted the voice.

"No . . . where," repeated Mauris weakly, fighting the cold fatigue

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of stillness, the weight of unbeing.

He could feel the laughter gathering, and knew that it would drown him. Desperation fought against the blind weariness sucking him into the heaving tide of sound. He tried to remember what it was like to pray.

"Oh, God," he whispered, "if I cannot die, let me become alive. Let there be light!"

Once more, the laughter struck. And the whirlpool opened.

IV

THERE were no stars yet, but the light came like a pallid finger, probing the interior of the stricken ship. Captain Mauris looked about him at dim shapes; and the sensation of wonder grew, while fear plucked its familiar music from his taut nerves.

There was something wrong—desperately wrong. Suddenly, he understood. Everything had been reversed.

The copper cylinder, which had been bolted to the deck on the port side of the main control panel, now lay on the starboard side, its smooth fiery surface crumpled like paper. Below it, on the deck, lay beads of still liquid copper rain.

The starboard electrochron, with its numerals reversed, now lay on the port side, above the gaping hole where the lightometer had been.

Captain Mauris turned his head to look at Kobler; but Phylo's berth now lay there in place of the physicist's. The captain knew without moving that his first officer was dead. Phylo stared at the deckhead, his features locked in a permanently vacant smile.

Glancing round at the S.F.P. chief, in Phylo's old place, Captain Mauris saw that Kobler's body was entirely relaxed. His eyes were closed; and in death, he had the appearance of one who is concentrating very hard. Judging from his expression, thought Mauris, he had been trying *in extremis* to discover his error.

The navigation deck of the *Santa Maria* was a mausoleum—through the looking-glass. Everything—even, as Mauris discovered, the parting in his own hair—had been reversed. He knew, without feeling the necessity to confirm it by exploration, that he was the last man alive.

The *Santa Maria,* with the sole exception of its captain, was manned entirely by the dead.

"Poor devils," said Captain Mauris aloud. "Poor devils, they couldn't take the stillness. It made them too tired—dead tired!"

The sound of his own voice, normal now, gave him a greater grasp on reality. With ponderous, heavy movements, like a drunken man, he undid the straps of his contour-berth and struggled wearily to his feet. He went across to Kobler, feeling for his pulse with a forlorn hope.

"Dead tired," repeated Mauris slowly. He gazed ruefully at Kob-

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ler's pale face, set in a last frown of concentration. *"There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio, than are dreamt of in your philosophy."*

Mauris felt neither regret nor satisfaction. There was no joy in knowing that he had the final word, that Kobler would never laugh that one away.

Presently he pulled himself together, and made a cautious tour of the ship. He was as methodical as if it was a monthly routine inspection, and checked everything from the conditioner to the recycling plant.

The ship, he noted ironically, was in perfect condition but for two small details: the planetary and stellar drives were completely wrecked. Apart from the fact that the landing retard and auxiliary brake rockets were intact, the *Santa Maria* was at the mercy of normal gravity fields.

There were only two reasonable possibilities. She might coast merrily in the void for ever, or drop eventually into a sun. The alternative was too improbable for consideration; for the chances of falling into the gravity field of an hospitable planet were several billion billion to one.

Finally, Captain Mauris was confronted with the task he had been subconsciously shirking. Steeling himself against a paralyzing reluctance, he climbed up into the astrodome and looked at the stars.

He did not need star charts to tell him that this was not the home galaxy. As he gazed at the sharp, unfamiliar patterns, an already tight band seemed to constrict round his heart. Perhaps Kobler had succeeded. Perhaps the galaxy M 81 had been entered by a terrene ship for the first time . . . Much good it would do the United Space Corporation!

With a grim smile, Mauris recalled that final paragraph of the ship's articles. *If the Master should satisfy himself, and the authorized scientists concerned, that the danger factor is sufficient* . . . It was really very funny! Probably, sixteen hundred thousand light years away, on a speck of cosmic dust, the *Field Testing Executive* had already set up their officious Court of Inquiry to consider possible reasons for the loss of their experimental ship.

Then suddenly he realized that if the *Santa Maria* had indeed reached M 81, the planet Earth was not only sixteen hundred thousand light years away, it was also sixteen hundred thousand years ago.

He had a sudden image of the *Field Testing Executive* with ape-like faces, sitting and jabbering pompously round a mud pool in some prehistoric steamy jungle . . . And Mauris laughed. He laughed loudly, raucously. He laughed until he cried—until weariness, in a sudden triumph, toppled him senseless on the deck. And there he lay, sleeping like a child whose nightmares materialize only when he is awake.

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He never knew how long he slept. He was eventually wakened by a sharp agonizing pain in his stomach. At last, through a fog of bewilderment, he diagnosed it as hunger. He staggered along to the mess-deck and operated the food delivery controls. A minute and a half later, he pulled a nicely roasted chicken, complete with potatoes and green peas, from the electronic cooker.

He ate ravenously, and followed it up with cheese and biscuits, coffee and liqueur brandy. The brandy was a special bottle that had been optimistically saved for a celebration banquet. As he sipped it luxuriously, Captain Mauris thought of all the guests who were unable to attend. Gravely, he included Kobler, Phylo and all the rest of the *Santa Maria's* personnel in the toast: "Absent friends!"

Then he took the old corncob pipe from his pocket and lit up. Presently, Captain Mauris was feeling almost human.

He spent the rest of the 'day' launching dead bodies into space. Wearing his combination pressure suit, Captain Mauris lugged them one after another through the airlock and gave them a shove. Kobler, Phylo and the rest went sailing smoothly out into the starry darkness. To each one, Captain Mauris gave a personal farewell, as if he might have been expecting an answer.

Presently, the *Santa Maria* was surrounded by a slowly dispersing shoal of flying corpses whose presence was only inferred where they blotted out the background of unwinking stars.

Finally, when all that unwelcome furniture had been jettisoned, the captain went back to the navigation deck and made the ship accelerate for three seconds on her auxiliary rockets, thus leaving the shoal behind. Having accomplished his disagreeable task, Mauris felt much better.

But as he clambered into the astrodome for a further check on the unfamiliar star positions, it dawned on him that he had probably looked on a human face for the last time.

Nine 'days' later, by the ship's electrochron, Captain Mauris became convinced that he would not have to wait much longer. The star on the port bow had grown to the size of a penny. Presently, it would grow to the size of a football. Presently, the *Santa Maria* and her captain would reach the end of their journey—in the purification of celestial fire.

He had already resigned himself calmly to his destiny and was, in truth, a little pleased that Fate had arranged a definite appointment with death for him. It was certainly preferable to drifting aimlessly for months, waiting until the food supply was exhausted, waiting until he went mad or plucked up enough courage to make the appointment on his own initiative.

The condemned man continued

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to eat hearty breakfasts, and settled down to enjoy, in his last days, what he had never yet experienced throughout his life—a period of sustained leisure. A period of rest and tranquility, interrupted by nothing more serious than the push-button operations necessary for providing first-class meals.

Captain Mauris spent more and more time in the ship's library, projecting the micro-films of books he had never had the time to read. Intuitively, he went to the old writers, ranging at a leisurely pace through fiction and non-fiction, from Plato to Dickens, from Homer to H. G. Wells. He also browsed through the Bible, and amused himself by translating its profound convictions into the sort of language that Kobler used.

By the eighteenth day, Captain Mauris was confused, disappointed, excited and afraid. The now brilliantly blinding sun had changed its position from port bow to starboard quarter. Its place on the port bow had been taken by what seemed to be a green marble.

Captain Mauris knew it was not another sun, and tried desperately not to allow himself to hope that it might be a habitable planet. Better to die by falling into an alien sun than survive, a castaway, on an unknown planet in some alien galaxy. His reason said so, but his emotions remained unconvinced.

It was then, for no reason at all, that he suddenly remembered the voice and the dreamlike laughter he had experienced in the total darkness, the absolute stillness of the galactic jump.

And Captain Mauris had a premonition.

V

ON THE twenty-fifth day the possibility became a certainty. The *Santa Maria* was falling towards the green planet. There remained the problem of choice between two courses of action. Captain Mauris could either allow the ship to continue her free fall until she vaporized on hitting the atmosphere—if any—or exploded on ground impact. Or else he could apply the auxiliary brake rockets and the landing retard, thus making a bid for survival.

The period of tranquility was over. He was in a state of chronic indecision. He was afraid in the very core of his being. He was afraid to make up his mind. The captain went uncertainly to the messdeck, seeking consolation and enlightenment in the liqueur brandy. He did not find it—drink wasn't the answer.

Eventually, he was drawn back to the navigation deck as by a magnet. He climbed into the astrodome and regarded the green planet. It was expanding rapidly, almost visibly. With trembling fingers, Captain Mauris adjusted the manual telescope. He gazed through it at a startlingly close panorama of oceans, continents and islands. He

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stared hypnotically for a while, and felt the beads of cold moisture grow on his forehead.

At last he came down, and went to drink more brandy. It solved nothing, because he was still sober enough to face the choice.

Suddenly, he could stand it no more. He lurched unsteadily to the navigation deck, reached the control panel and threw in three switches almost simultaneously. Reflex-radar, altimeter and positioning gyro were immediately synchronized with the auto-pilot. Whether the reversed instruments functioned correctly or not, Mauris neither knew nor cared. He had rid himself of an intolerable weight.

He had made a decision.

Immediately, he, who had accepted so much responsibility in his career, felt an overwhelming need to escape the responsibility of attempting to survive. He fled to the library and, forcing himself to try and forget the decision, placed a random micro-film in the book projector. It was *The Golden Ass* of Apuleius.

He looked at the words, and they had no meaning for him. He was too busy awaiting the shock of the first automatic blast of the auxiliary brake rockets.

After an eternity of hours that seemed years, he felt a sharp surge as the motors produced a field of double gravity, piling on the ship's own synthetic 1/3 G force.

Mauris fell sideways from his chair and lay on the bulkhead, groaning heavily. The rocket burst lasted five seconds, and he felt crushed by its relentless force. Abruptly, it ended: he slithered painfully to the deck.

Then the old habits reasserted themselves. The Master's place, in a power maneuver, was on the navigation deck. Captain Mauris picked himself up and made his way forward.

The second automatic power maneuver hit him before he could reach a contour-berth. A field of 5 G slammed him against the bulkhead of the navigation deck. He had fallen sideways about ten feet. He lay there spread-eagled, unconscious.

The auto-pilot had positioned the ship accurately. The ship's attitude, controlled by the gyro-manipulator, had brought the green planet dead astern; and with rockets blazing, the *Santa Maria* dropped backwards to that rapidly expanding surface. On the screens of the external visualators, the silvery shapes of mountains and hills, of rivers and forests leaped into a growing reality. The fleecy shapes of clouds passed like fantastic birds.

But Captain Mauris lay inert against the bulkhead; the accelerating G force crushing his unconscious body to the hard metal.

He awoke with every muscle aching from the tremendous stress of ordinary physical deceleration; but he awoke with a sensation of profound peace.

He picked himself up and climb-

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ed into the astrodome. The stars were no longer sharp unwinking points against a backcloth of jet. They twinkled, dancing to the whim of atmosphere.

Looking down, Captain Mauris felt his heart thump violently. The *Santa Maria* had made a perfect automatic landing on what appeared, in the semi-darkness, to be smooth grassland. A few yards away, he thought he saw dimly the ripple of running water.

The United Space Corporation had laid down a cautious and definitive procedure for the exploration of strange planets. But, as Mauris told himself lightly, the United Space Corporation would not begin to exist even in its own galaxy for another sixteen hundred thousand years.

Casting discretion aside, Captain Mauris made his way aft towards the air-lock. He seized a combination pressure suit and climbed into it impatiently. Then he entered the pressure chamber. He closed the door behind him and threw the switch. The needle remained steady, indicating that the external pressure—the planetary atmosphere—was at par.

Captain Mauris was surprised. He began to feel that it was part of some obliging dream. He pressed a luminous button on the bulkhead, and the heavy door of the entry-port swung open. The captain took a nylon ladder from its locker and secured one end to the stanchions of the entry-port. He tossed out the bundle of ladder and watched it drop through the misty atmosphere. Then slowly he climbed down.

Captain Mauris stood still and gazed at the terrain through a deceptive half-light. What he could see of it was so reassuringly normal as to be quite improbable. It might have been country in the temperate zones of Earth.

He tried to think of the fantastic chances against landing on such a planet after the *Santa Maria* had crippled both her stellar and planetary drives in the extra-galactic jump. Logically, there was no chance. What had happened was merely impossible.

Luck, thought Captain Mauris. *Or is it something else?*

With sudden inexplicable determination, he tried to tempt Fate for the last time. He released the safety valve on his pressure suit. Nothing happened. With an audible laugh of triumph and amazement, he began to take off the headpiece. Presently he stepped out of the pressure suit, his oxygen cylinder unneeded.

Captain Mauris stood on an unknown planet and took in the unmistakable scents of summer. He felt drunk—drunk on the sheer fantasy of reality.

As he gazed about him he saw, over a patch of woodland, gray streaks of light pushing back the darkness, dulling the stars. And fifty yards from the spaceship, he discerned the edge of a stream whose quiet murmur seemed sud-

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denly to communicate with his awakened sense of hearing.

Giving a wild cry of pleasure, Mauris forgot all about space-frame physicists and the extra-galactic jump. He ran swiftly to the banks of the stream, knelt down and splashed the warm living water over his face. Then, impatiently, he tore off his stale clothes, and waded into the dark refreshing water.

And as he bathed, the intensity of light grew over the distant trees, turning their leaves to gold.

At last he came out of the stream, refreshed and exhilarated. He felt a warm breeze against his body, felt the blood coursing more rapidly through his veins.

He did not bother to dress, but walked wonderingly towards the increasing light.

The vault of darkness was being pushed slowly back, while the stars seemed to slip behind an invisible curtain.

Captain Mauris watched the landscape come quietly to life. Then he looked up at the sky.

"And darkness," said Captain Mauris, as he gazed at the fading stars, "darkness was upon the face of the deep."

He stood there, feeling the years roll back, feeling the vitality of youth drive back some secret winter. At length he turned round to look at the space-ship, to assure himself of the reality of the journey. There was nothing to be seen. The thin vein of water flowed quietly through a vacant land.

Surprised at his own calmness, his lack of distress, he turned again towards the patch of trees. And from the direction that he would learn to call east, there rose the crimson edge of a new sun.

He remembered then and suddenly understood the message of a woman's voice in a dream of absolute stillness.

THE ASSISTANT SELF

By F. L. WALLACE

The human brain with all of its winding complexities can underwrite a drama extraordinary—if a master storyteller has the wit and wisdom to deal boldly with the assistant self. The assistant self, you see, is a creature of a thousand talents and he springs full-grown from a tormented man's abnormal empathy in a world of research miracles and industrial strife. And that's why we so strongly urge you not to miss F. L. Wallace's pulse-stirring lead novelet in our very next issue. And when you've learned the precise meaning of a thermal concussion and how the difference between one person and another can be collapsed to zero we predict you'll turn back and read THE ASSISTANT SELF *all over again.*

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grandma's lie soap

by . . . Robert Abernathy

Grandma's soap was a miracle of miracles under the stars. If you don't believe it—just try lying to the flying saucer folk.

OF COURSE you'll believe this story. Everybody will. The funny thing is that it *could* be a lie . . .

To make that point clearer: A little while ago I happened to be at a gathering of literary amateurs and critics, one of those sprawling aimless affairs where people mill around with drinks in their hands, congealing in little clusters to talk or listen to somebody talk.

I listened. I heard a serious bespectacled young man discourse not unintelligently on Proust, and I heard a plump gentleman make some safe, sound comments on Faulkner.

Nobody disagreed with them. Nobody argued. Nobody even said, "But—"

I can remember when arguments were the order of the day.

After I'd had a little more of it than I could stand, I spoke up. "Say what you like about those scribblers," I declared firmly, "none of them can hold a candle to Wolf."

"Thomas?" someone asked—not with the air of being about to contradict me, but merely as one sincerely, infuriatiingly desiring instruction.

To free Truth from its wrappings with the sparkling irony and engaging insight of a prophetic pen was the self-appointed task of Robert Abernathy in this remarkable story. He's succeeded so well that we'll never see a frail old woman hobbling down a country lane or a cake of homemade soap without bracing ourselves against the collapse of our world and the coming of the millennium.

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"No, *Howling*," I retorted with flamboyant irony. "Do you mean to say you never heard of Howling Wolf, the genius of the North Woods, the greatest author of all time? The one writer who grasped the human soul in all its depth, breadth, and angular momentum? Who painted Life in its true colors on a canvas vast as all Nature, with a non-union brush? Who sounded every note of emotional experience, and rang all the bells in belles lettres? Who—"

I ran out of breath, paused, and added, "Of course, unfortunately all of Wolf's mighty works were written in his native language, which happened to be Chinook Trade Jargon, and they've never been translated. So if you don't know the Jargon . . ."

At my age I should have known better. Naturally, every word I uttered was gospel but all I got back were earnest requests for more information about the great Wolf. To explain that I'd just been kidding—that I say such things experimentally and to keep in practice as one of the few remaining liars in a truthful world—would have been worse than useless. It would have been cruelty to talking animals.

I mumbled, "Pardon me," to all the nice, candid, inquisitive, credulous faces. I grabbed my hat and pulled it over my eyes, and ducked out. Not that I imagined I'd get away from the consequences. I could already envisage how the ripples would spread. For a long while to come I'd get inquiries in the mail from literary clubs, collectors, compilers of biographical dictionaries. Probably there'd be a Howling Wolf Commemorative Society organized, and if I told them he was buried at the bottom of the Chicago Drainage Canal, they'd go and strew posies there.

But this is not the story of Howling Wolf. It is the story of Grandma's lie soap.

When I first remember Grandma, back when I was one of the numerous grandchildren — my brothers, sisters, and assorted cousins who overran the old hill-country farm during vacations—she was already a dried-up little old lady who couldn't have weighed ninety pounds, with a brown, wrinkled face and intolerant black eyes.

She ruled the farm with an iron hand and my two taciturn uncles, who did the heavy work, moved silently about, tending to chores, crops, and stock in obedience to her orders. The farm thrived, too. Even in bad years, when other people's corn was stunted and wells ran dry, nothing of the sort befell Grandma.

Sometimes — though I didn't know this until I was older—the neighbors muttered, and insisted, obviously out of envy, there was something queer about Grandma. Queerness they detected, I suppose, in her fondness for cats—which most of the country people tolerated without affection—and in her

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long walks in the woods by herself, gathering plants that she dried and kept in unlabeled jars.

Too, a tradition had it that back in England in the seventeenth century one of her female ancestors had been accused of bewitching cattle by the celebrated witchfinder, Mr. Samson Broadforks, who fell ill shortly afterward of an ailment believed to be foot-and-mouth disease. Be that as it may, the ancestor in question emigrated to America around that time.

But we children, of course, saw nothing odd about our Grandma. Childishly, we assumed that everybody had a grandmother who kept a piece of lie soap on the high shelf over the washstand.

This was a chunk of strong brown soap, like all the rest of the boiled-fat products that Grandma made in the old iron wash-kettle after hog-killing. But it wasn't ordinary soap. It was made separately and privately, from some of the herbs that Grandma had in her jars, from a recipe she kept in her head and nowhere else.

Because, you see, another thing about Grandma was that she couldn't abide being lied to. Not, I'm sure, out of any abstract devotion to Truth, but simply because the idea of anyone fooling *her* made her furious. If somebody tried it, and that somebody was one of her own grandchildren, she knew what to do . . .

For instance, I can still vividly recall the time when my city cousin Richard first came visiting on the farm. This Richard was a pale, supercilious brat who lived in New York City. As soon as he made sure that no one else on the farm had been similarly blessed, he sized us up for yokels and set about overawing us with the marvels of the metropolis.

Grandma, busy round the kitchen range, listened silently for a while. But we who knew her well could see the storm warnings going up—the tightening lips and the dangerous gleam in her eye. Richard didn't see anything, naturally. He finished describing the George Washington Bridge and went on to the skyscrapers.

That did it. Grandma slammed a skillet down and fastened a harpy grip on Richard's collar. "Come along, young man," she said grimly. "You needn't think you can pull *my* leg!"

And she wagged him off to the washstand, the rest of us trailing after in delighted horror.

"Oliver—" Grandma addressed me, because I was already a gangling thirteen then— "Reach me down the lie soap!"

I did so, gingerly, and before the bawling Richard knew what was happening he was sputtering through a haze of suds, his mouth thoroughly washed out with the strong soap.

"Now!" said Grandma briskly, releasing him and stepping back. "Take a dipper of water, and then answer me: Were you or weren't

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you exaggerating when you said there was buildings there ten miles high?"

Richard opened and closed his mouth. He grew red in the face with effort. He said, "N . . . N . . . Yes, ma'am, I was exaggerating."

You could see that he was thunderstruck to find that he couldn't do anything but tell the truth. He had yet to learn what the rest of us knew and took for granted. Once anybody had his mouth washed out with Grandma's lie soap, he could never again in this life speak a falsehood, however much he might want to.

A quarter of an hour later, Grandma had mollified Richard with bread and jam and encouraged him to talk some more. She listened with keen interest as he described the Holland Tunnel, nodding her head occasionally and exclaiming, "My, my! Who would have thought it?"

Now, you see, she knew that every word was true.

If I'd been smarter—but maybe I'm still not smart, except in hindsight—I might have seen the shape of things to come in that incident. But I wasnt, and I didn't.

II

At one time or another, all of Grandma's grandchildren got their mouths washed with the lie soap—all but me. Why I was spared, I've often wondered. It wasn't for lack of provocation, that's certain. I've thought perhaps Grandma had an intuitive grasp of scientific method, and kept me as a control. Or . . . well, so far as I know, Grandma was the only one of the family in her generation who possessed the secret of the lie soap, and she didn't pass it on to any of her children, who were all sober, truthful, financially unsuccessful citizens. But I'm pretty sure that Grandma herself never got the lie soap treatment as a child.

I grew up, and summers on the farm receded into memory. I went to college, specialized in chemistry, and emerged with rosy visions of science remaking the world. I fell then, naturally into a research job with Gorley and Gorley, who at that time were one of the bigger companies making chemicals, synthetics, cleansers, pharmaceuticals and the like.

The laboratories which I shared with a number of other young and not-so-young research men were magnificent, their chrome-and-porcelain splendor making the university labs where we'd studied seem small and dingy by comparison.

Here I had the facilities and—assigned work being light at the time—the spare time to follow up a project of which I'd become enamored in school—a line on antibiotic synthesis. I almost lived in that lab for some weeks, at the end of which time I had sufficient promising results to make up a summary of them, together with

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an urgent request for materials needed to carry the investigation through to a successful conclusion.

I submitted this report to the Coordinator, a fussy, harassed little man, who nervously promised to call it to the attention of the front office, and assigned me to work on the problem of producing a red detergent powder that would not make pink suds.

Time went by, and nothing happened. Naturally I reminded the Coordinator, but he assured me that the matter had merely slipped his mind. To make a sad story short, I finally found out how things worked. Communications between the research department and the front office, i.e. the sales department, went only one way.

When the latter had decided just what sort of epoch-making miracle of modern science the buying public was ripe for, word would come down, and if we happened to have such a miracle on hand, well and good. Otherwise, we could produce it, or a reasonable facsimile thereof, in time for the scheduled start of the advertising campaign.

It was O'Brien who first explained this system in full to me. O'Brien was an Assistant Sales Manager and an advertising man from way back. But he was also a human being.

"Over there with your test tubes, kid," he said bluntly. "You're playing pin-the-tail-on-the-donkey. Sometimes you hit, oftener you miss. But you're never quite sure in advance. Right?"

I had to admit he had hit on a pretty fair description of scientific research in general.

"But," said O'Brien, "by us in Sales it's *hit, hit, hit,* all the time. We can't wait for you boys to get that tail pinned on straight. But sometimes you do, don't you?" He sighed.

"God help us, some of the characters I associate with don't even know that. They can't see any difference between having something to sell and having to sell something. So when you *do* hit, let me know, and I'll see what I can do at my end."

He was as good as his word, too. A couple of times when we'd fumbled around and come up with a product that people really needed, something to keep them from dying, for instance, or to make not dying worth their while, he went to bat for us in the sales department.

I've described at length the situation at Gorley and Gorley, first because it had a direct bearing on what happened later, and second because it was typical of a way of life which is past, and which the younger generation nowadays has difficulty even in imagining. I'm referring, of course, to the middle of the twentieth century with its feverish atmosphere of compulsory Progress or a reasonable fascimile thereof and of the glitter that was sometimes gold.

It was the era of the false front,

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the false rear and the questionable middle, of scandal, slander, and the Hard Sell. It was also the Age of the *Big Lie*, as somebody called it. But it was even more the age of the little half-truth.

During those years when I was growing up—a painful process then, though it doesn't seem to be so any more—my education progressed along other lines as well.

There was my baptism of politics. I joined with the enthusiasts working for nomination of a reform slate of candidates against those of the city machine. We were too innocent to know that it was an unpropitious time. For one thing, it wasn't a Presidential year and the vote was bound to be light, and for another, the last reform administration was still too fresh in public memory, and the machine was riding high.

The opposition called us idealistic crackpots, conniving scoundrels, and dimwits who didn't know what it was all about. They had the money and they spent it on a flood of lies from the platform, through the mail, and from sound trucks that rolled bellowing through the streets. Finally, our candidates were snowed under in the primaries and not so much as a reform dogcatcher appeared on the ticket.

That was another bruising experience for an easy bruiser such as I was. After the crescendo of activity, the speeches, the leaflets, the house-to-house canvasses, after the starry-eyed phrases about cleaning up local government as a first step toward cleaning up the country and the world . . .

I took a freshly disillusioned look at that world. It was a world where the leaders of great nations daily pointed to one another as conspirators plotting to exterminate the human race, and where "security" and fear grew rankly intertwined as the ordinary man learned to swallow the idea that *he* couldn't be trusted with the truth about anything really important. It was a world where, consequently, the scaremongers, the inside scoopers, and the genuine conspirators throve mightily.

And, finally, there was Alice.

Alice was in the bookkeeping department at Gorley and Gorley. She didn't have the kind of looks that make cover photographers and movie scouts drool and lunge. But she had something, a spontaneous allure, a magnetism that must surely have upset the IBM machines she worked with.

I met Alice, was magnetized, polarized, and lost. Lost and happy. When I proposed to her, and she said *Yes*, I felt that my good fortune was *too* good to be true. And it was. Some three weeks later she handed back the ring. She couldn't marry me. It had all been a mistake, and so on.

Two days afterward I encountered her by accident in a corridor at the plant. She wore another ring, with a bigger diamond. I stopped

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her, and roughly demanded: "Who?"

Stumblingly, she told me. He was a junior executive, a young-man-who-would-go-far with family connections and stock in the company. Alice was a smart girl, and she'd simply bettered herself. I guess I said some rather bitter things on that subject.

"No, Oliver," she insisted. "It's not like that at all. It's just that I don't love you. I never did." But she wouldn't meet my eyes.

When I'd cooled down a bit, I realized that she was being honest with me after a fashion. She was lying to me in just the same terms she was lying to herself. And at the same time, recalling little details of her behavior, I realized why.

Alice was afraid. Her people had been poor, and she knew what it meant. Anyway, who *wasn't* afraid in those days, except for the feeble-minded and some of the insane? So she was looking for security, a place to hide, in that world of the nineteen-fifties where there wasn't any place to hide. But what was the use of telling her that?

I did some serious drinking, enough to convince me that I wasn't cut out to make a career of it. It was during the sobering-up process that I got the Idea. I wonder how many of the thoughts that changed the world have been fathered by hangovers?

I had some days' vacation with pay coming, so it was comparatively easy. I took a plane, a train, and a ramshackle bus. I then swung in on a grapevine and there I was, walking up the familiar path to the old farmhouse door, where I hadn't been for a span of years that astonished me when I counted them.

Grandma was out in the back yard hanging out a wash of patched work shirts and faded blue overalls. She said without surprise, "How do, Oliver," and went right on finishing her task, while I watched with suppressed impatience.

Finally she picked up the empty clothes basket and led the way into the house. It was getting dusk, so she lit a kerosene lamp in the kitchen, where supper was simmering on the cast-iron range.

"Grandma," I fumbled, "I came down here—"

"I can see that," Grandma interrupted. "How do you like my new teeth, Oliver?" She grinned at me alarmingly. "Today's my birthday—ninety-first or ninety-fourth or something like that, I forget—so I went to town and got me my new teeth. Pretty, eh, boy? Figure they ought to do me another ten or twelve years."

"Yes, Grandma," I said, a little dazedly.

She peered at me searchingly. "Well, Oliver? Speak up. You've got troubles written all over you."

I'd more or less rehearsed a persuasive speech, but sitting there in Grandma's lamplit kitchen I felt as if the years had fallen away and I was like a little boy who had

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run away from home and come back sorry.

In considerable disorder I poured out the story of how I'd gone out into the world and what I'd found it like. I covered all of it, my work and how little it amounted to compared to what it could have meant to me, and my experience with the way people were governed—even Alice. Above all, I told her how at every turning I had been lied to, and had heard people lie to one another, and seen them lie to themselves.

Grandma nodded once or twice as she listened, which encouraged me. I remembered a scrap from the arguments I'd meant to muster: "Some philosopher once said that a lie is the Original Sin itself. Without it, all other crimes become impossible."

"So," Grandma broke in, "you want the recipe for my lie soap."

"Uh . . . yes, that's right," I admitted. "It's the answer. Your ancestors and mine had no right to hold it back this long. Look, Grandma. The company I work for makes mouth washes, toothpastes, and the like. Millions of people use their products; and if a new 'miracle ingredient' were publicized the right way, other companies with more millions of customers would have to adopt it too."

I was counting on O'Brien. I'd explain it to him squarely, and somehow we'd manage to put it over.

Grandma got up to stir a kettle. She took her time, while I held my breath. Finally she said, "I'm going to give you the recipe, Oliver—"

My heart leaped.

"—but not for ten or twenty years yet. Not until you've learned a mite of caution. I was your age once, myself, and I thought how nice it would be to make the world over tomorrow morning, and sit down and admire it tomorrow afternoon. Now I know better, and so will you."

I pleaded and argued, but it was no use. The old lady was adamant. Finally I fell glumily silent, while Grandma went about setting the table for supper.

On the train coming down I'd bought a newspaper out of sheer habit, and, preoccupied, hadn't even opened it. It lay now on the table, and Grandma picked it up to glance at the headlines. Suddenly I realized she'd been standing motionless, staring at the paper, for a remarkably long time. There was a look I'd never seen before on her wrinkled face.

I heard her whisper to herself, *"The Moon!"* But that didn't make any sense until I looked over her shoulder and read:

Air Force Rocket Lands on Moon

Still I didn't understand Grandma's agitation. I said banally, "Well, we've known for quite a while they were going to try it."

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"The Moon!". Grandma repeated. She went on wanderingly, "You know, that just reminds me of one night in a buggy . . ." Her voice trailed off, and she brooded darkly, which was strange indeed in her.

Then she let the paper fall, and said briskly, "I've changed my mind, Oliver."

"You mean—"

"Yes. You can have the lie soap. I'll write the recipe out and give it to you for a birthday present."

I said stupidly, "It's not my birthday, though."

"No, it's mine." She cackled with a return of the old merriment. She found a stub of pencil, tore off a corner of newspaper, and began writing in a crabbed hand.

As she wrote she muttered, only half to me: "Evening of the day they dropped the Bomb, your Uncle Henry told me: 'Ma, the time's come.' But I said, 'No.' I said, 'People may be crazy, but they're not crazy enough to blow the whole world up and them on it.'

"But now . . . If there's a Man in the Moon, and he's got a Bomb in his hand and all he's got to do is fling it, what's to stop him? *Him.* he's safe in the Moon . . . *There!*" She held out the scrap of paper. "Go on, boy, do what you like with it, and I hope you like what you do! I held back, I never thought I'd live to see times like these. But there's some duties you just can't shirk, boy, I don't have to tell you that."

III

Bill, Jerry and I slipped into a booth at the tavern near the plant. Looking across the table at Jerry, I marveled at how well he was keeping up the act, the casual off-hours good-fellowship. As for me, I felt sure my tense nerves were showing.

While Jerry called Bill's attention to the waitress' walk, I dropped a little, fast-dissolving white tablet into Bill's drink.

As he picked it up and sipped, I felt a qualm which I ruthlessly stifled. This test *had* to be made. We—Jerry and I, since I'd taken him into my confidence as a man I could trust and a wizard at organic chemistry—had studied the lie-soap formula backward and forward. We'd analyzed samples of it I'd obtained from Grandma, and isolated—or so we thought—the active ingredients. But we had to know, and we could hardly experiment on animals.

Bill set down an empty glass. I grew tenser. Jerry inquired, "Another?" and when Bill shook his head, asked the sixty-four-thousand-dollar question. "So—you've decided to quit lushing around, nad get some work done for a change?"

That was one of the trick questions we'd settled on—a variation of the old "Have you stopped beating your wife?" formula. If Bill had been quite normal, he'd have answered, "Hell no," or, "Yeah, guess I better," or some answer as

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jocular and meaningless as the question. But if our elixir of lie soap worked, he'd answer—with a peculiar, embarrassed gulp of hesitation:

"But I don't lush around, and I get a good deal of work done."

Which was what he *did* say. Because it was the truth, silly and pompous as it sounded there and then.

I could see Jerry rallying himself to ask some more telling questions, and I knew he was feeling an emotion exactly like mine—exultation curiously mixed with shame.

Both of us realized at that moment, I guess, that it was going to mean no more friendly kidding over a couple of beers, no more harmless insults and bragging, no more fish stories . . . But of course there's always a price.

I went to O'Brien.

He heard me out without changing expression. When I'd laid all the cards on the table, he said slowly, "If this stuff will really do what you say—"

"It will," I assured him. "It has."

"In that case, my young scientific friend, do you realize what you're asking me to do? I've spent twenty years in the advertising game. You might say I've devoted my life to it. Now you want me to help you with a scheme that'll wipe out advertising as we know it—lock, stock, and barrel."

"I—I hadn't thought of it like that."

"In other words," O'Brien went on, "you're offering me the fulfillment of my fondest dreams. Shake on it, kid!"

Then he settled back and grew thoughtful. "But it isn't going to be easy. I guess you still have trouble believing it, but I can't just walk into a sales conference and say, 'See here, I've got wind of a product that's the greatest boon to humanity since fire and the wheel,' and expect them to fall all over me. We need a good promotion angle."

"There's got to be some way."

"Keep your shirt on. I'll find one. I haven't been in the business for twenty years for nothing. But one thing anyway. Until this deal is swung, keep your witch's brew away from me!"

The convincer came, after all, from an idea I had. But it was O'Brien who saw the possibilities and, by dint of massive doses of double-talk and cajolery, arranged for a test survey of a hundred volunteer subjects. These human guinea pigs were furnished gratis with a thirty days' supply of a new toothpaste—a standard base, plus Grandma's lie soap—and, when the time was up, were quizzed as to their reactions to the experiment.

Almost without exception, they professed themselves well pleased. Of course, that was what the sales department wanted to hear about—satisfied customers.

As to *why* our subjects felt better after trying a new dentifrice, they couldn't say because they didn't know. It was merely that their out-

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look on life seemed to have become sunnier, and their personal relations more agreeable—apart from a few unfortunate domestic upsets, about which, however, the victims themselves seemed remarkably cheerful.

I thought I knew why. My pet theory was working out. Though I was no psychologist, I'd always been sure that a lot of people's mental difficulties and prevailing unhappiness was due solely to their inveterate habit of deceiving themselves. But these people who'd tried Grandma's lie soap couldn't even lie to themselves any more.

This outcome made our brave new world look braver in prospect —as well as likelier. A couple of days later the company's directors made the decision to go into production; and it was rumored that another of the biggest firms was already dickering for a look at the formula.

We had no trouble with the Bureau of Standards. After all, we only had to satisfy them that the stuff was harmless. Presumably they tried it on mice . . .

To celebrate the directors' decision, I invited Alice and her new fiancé to dinner. I was rather vague about what we were celebrating, so that they left no wiser than when they came. But they were much more candid, since I had a supply of the little white tablets on hand.

I gave the leaven most of the evening to work, and at eleven o'clock called Alice's apartment. I'd timed it correctly. She was in. In tears, too—judging by her voice.

"You and he must have said some pretty nasty things to each other," I remarked sympathetically. "Too bad about the engagement."

"Oh, it was *awful!* He said—he *admitted* that if it weren't for my b-bosom— And I told him—oh, how could I say *that?* But Oliver, how did you know?"

"I saw it coming. And now you're home all alone, and sort of wishing I was there to console you . . . aren't you?"

There was one of those pauses I'd learned to recognize. Then she said strangledly, "Y-yes. I was. I am. But *Oliver*—people don't—"

"Sometimes they do," I said. "Hold on. I'll be right up."

When a woman has once told the truth to a man, either everything is over between them, or everything has just begun.

From then on the story is mostly history.

Gorley and Gorley's new improved toothpaste with Verolin began outselling all other brands. Other companies saw that the new ingredient — for reasons nobody quite understood—was becoming more indispensable than chlorophyll had been somewhat earlier, and paid through the nose for the right to use it. G and G added a Verolin mouthwash to their line, and it was also a snowballing success. All the time, of course, Verolin was really Grandma's lie soap.

These products blanketed the

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country and went into the export market. They went all over civilization, if you define civilization as those regions of the Earth where people use toothbrushes and seek to avoid halitosis—or, anyway, all over what was then called "the free world" by its inhabitants and "the enslaved world" by the publicists of the "free world" on the other side.

The returns began coming in.

IV

A WELL-KNOWN radio news commentator paused for a refreshing gargle in the mid-break of his program, was unable to continue broadcasting, and resigned the same day.

Various other commentators and newspaper columnists suffered more or less similar fates, while a good many newspapers and periodicals underwent violent shifts of editorial policy.

Half a dozen magazines having the word "True" in their titles suspended publication.

Quite a few authors, including some more than usually successful ones, abandoned their profession. Surprisingly, those who quit included some who had been praised by the critics for the stark realism of their work, and among those who did not quit were some whose writings were regarded as sheer imaginative flights.

As for the critics, most of them took up useful trades.

A number of university professors conscientiously resigned, stating that they could not teach "facts" which they did not know to be true.

Several hitherto popular and, to their founders, profitable religious cults abruptly disintegrated. In one case there was a riot, when the Prophet of the Luminous Truth appeared in a mass meeting and told his followers some home truths about himself, his doctrines, and themselves.

Most of the churches lost grievously in membership, though at the same time they enjoyed an accession of new converts. Those whose rites included confession complained that, somehow, the act appeared to be losing its deep significance.

Psychoanalysts at first rejoiced over their sudden wholesale success in overcoming their patients' "resistances," and a little later were appalled by their empty waiting rooms.

The divorce rate skyrocketed, then plunged to a permanent record low. Conversely, the marriage rate at first fell off sharply, then climbed gradually back to normal. The birth rate was unaffected.

Innumerable lawyers took down their shingles.

Congressional investigating committees enjoyed a field day, but fell prey to an increasing nervous frustration as witness after witness refused to perjure himself.

In Washington, D. C., a conservatively-dressed gentleman checked

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into a hotel, came down to the lobby after brushing his teeth, and in response to a commercial traveler's casual question said, "My business? Well, I'm a secret agent for the Soviet Union. And you?"

Police in scores of cities were swamped by confessions of offenses ranging from multiple murder to double parking, and were bewildered by the absence of the expected percentage of false confessions.

For the first time in modern history, the number of homicides exceeded the number of suicides. In general, crimes of stealth virtually ceased to occur, while crimes of violence continued at about their previous level and reported cases of rape declined spectacularly.

Numerous government officials admitted themselves guilty of peculation and malfeasance in office. The business bureaucracy was even harder hit. Among the casualties was a prominent board member of Gorley and Gorley.

To my particular satisfaction, the mayor our local machine had elected made a public speech—apparently unaware that he was doing anything out of the way—in which he thanked by name the boys who had purchased the most votes for him in the last campaign, also those who had put in the strong-arm work.

All the F.B.I. agents doing undercover work in the Communist Party were exposed, and as a result the party went bankrupt for lack of dues paying members.

As O'Brien had predicted, the advertising business collapsed, burying many lesser enterprises under the ruins. But somehow no general financial panic took place.

A man from Texas was heard to confess that he sometimes got tired of hearing about Texas, and even admitted it couldn't be twice as large as the rest of the United States.

Events such as these were the convulsions, the death throes of an old world and the birth pangs of a new.

Their final phase was the breakdown of the international situation, which had continued for over a decade in a sort of deadly balance. The balance was destroyed when U. S. and other Western diplomats adopted a new tack which provoked, in their Eastern-bloc opponents, reactions first of suspicious alarm, then of bafflement, and finally of a dazed conviction that the spirit of Marxian history had at long last delivered the enemy into their hands—which last impression led directly to their undoing.

Forgetting the chiseler's basic precept—you can't cheat an honest man—they set about exploiting the situation by extracting from the West all the technical information they coveted, and which was now theirs for the asking. Along with plutonium refinement methods and guided missile designs, they obtained, naturally, the formula for Grandma's lie soap, alias Verolin.

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The counterparts of Gorley and Gorley's sales department, in their government-run industries, were also shrewdly alive to the importance of having satisfied customers. Clearly, they reasoned, studying our records, this is a good thing, this is a valuable bit of *kul'tura* . . .

From there on developments followed pretty much the pattern already established in the West. There were some painful incidents, such as the Kiev massacre of former secret police agents, and the three days when *Pravda* shut down to retool. But on the whole, the reaction was more than anything else like that of a man who comes to the top and takes breath at last, after very nearly drowning.

The Iron Curtain sagged, fell apart, and sank into oblivion. Grandma's lie soap had conquered the world.

V

SINCE I retired, I've been using my leisure in exploration and observation of this world which I did a good deal to create, this world which differs so much from the one I grew up in and can remember better than most others even of my own generation. They've had the treatment, and they've changed. But I still brush my teeth with a salt-and-soda mixture.

In many ways, the present era answers to the visions that were called Utopian when I was a boy —called that, usually, with a sneer. A lot of the social and political reforms we only dreamed about then have been carried out as a matter of course which was inevitable once people stopped lying themselves and one another black in the face.

Mental diseases, tangled lives, crime have all been swept away—not to mention the threat of war that was the Great Shadow overlying all the lesser shadows of the old world.

An election campaign now is carried on in an atmosphere of sobriety and statesmanship that would have given an old-time politician the creeps. None of the old bandstand, circus stuff . . . Speaking of that, one thing I miss is the circus. I used to like to listen to the sideshow barkers—an extinct tribe. I know, they still have circuses, or call them that; but P. T. Barnum would disown them.

But . . people look one another in the eyes much more than they ever used to. They don't seem afraid. There's confidence—not the ballooning confidence that led to big economic booms and bigger busts, but a trust resting on solid foundations.

Still, sometimes I wonder.

Not long ago I ran into O'Brien, for the first time in years, in a bar. People don't drink as much as they did, but O'Brien had been drinking a good deal.

"How are you?" I said automatically, the sight of such a long-remembered face making me for-

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get that that particular greeting wasn't used nowadays.

He began a detailed description of his general state of health and present state of intoxication. "Oh," I said. "You've had it."

"Yeah," said O'Brien. "I broke down and took the treatment. I got like everybody else. I couldn't stand the temptation any more. You know what I mean?"

I knew exactly what he meant. For him, with his background, it must have been much worse.

"Maybe," said O'Brien thickly, "I could have been dictator of the world if I'd wanted. But this way's better." He signaled the waiter, then looked at me curiously. "You —not yet?"

"Not yet," I said. "Maybe never. I like to watch things."

"Watch the sheep run," mumbled O'Brien. "All sheep . . ."

He was drunk, but he'd had Grandma's lie soap, and he spoke the truth.

Perhaps there's too much confidence.

Once in a while I yield a little to that temptation O'Brien mentioned, but always in harmless ways, merely for amusement or out of curiosity to see just how much people *will* swallow. Like in that fabrication of Howling Wolf, the genius of the North Woods, which I told you about in the beginning. More and more I find that they'll believe almost anything, especially the younger generation. Older people still have a residuum of skepticism.

Now it's plain—using hindsight —that we should easily have foreseen the secondary effect. But it developed very slowly. No physiological effect, this, but a psychological one—or simply logical. Once people stop lying, they'll also stop suspecting deceit. They'll believe as they expect to be believed. Little by little, particularly as the young ones who don't remember grow up, they'll become totally—gullible, it used to be called.

A while back, down South, there was an unwashed prophet who made converts right and left to a weird sect of his own devising—until somebody seduced him into heathenish ways, and he tried brushing his teeth. But incidents like that don't really disturb me. As the example shows, they all come out in the wash.

Yet there is something that bothers me. Back before Grandma's lie soap, we used to get sporadic reports of "mysterious airships," "flying saucers," or similarly named equivalents for unexplained objects in the sky. We laughed them off, mostly, because people were always starting crazy rumors . . . After the great change, those reports might have been expected to stop coming.

But they didn't.

And more recently there have been some queer phenomena noted by the space station and the bubbles on the Moon.

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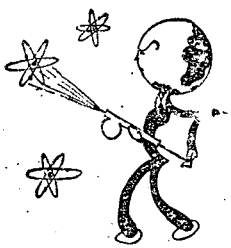
So suppose we're not alone in the Universe or even in the Solar System? And suppose that whoever is out there—circling us, observing us with immense caution for so long—are beings like *we* used to be—fierce, wary, enormously suspicious as their behavior suggests, capable of any falsehood, any treachery?

Wolves, circling the sheep . . .

Perhaps it's all my imagination. I can't be sure. There's only one way I can be sure even of what I think myself.

Pretty soon now I'll go into the bathroom and wash my mouth with Grandma's lie soap. Then I'll look into the mirror and ask myself, face to face, with no possibility of deception: *Did I do right?*

What will my answer be?



Among the Contributors to Next Month's F. U. *will be*

F. L. WALLACE,
with "The Assistant Self"

ROBERT SHECKLEY,
with "The Skag Castle"

ROBERT F. YOUNG,
with "The Other Kids"

IB MELCHIOR,
with "The Vidiot"

MARION ZIMMER BRADLEY,
with "Death Between the Stars"

and many others

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shades of davy crockett

by . . . Theodore Pratt

Davy Crockett had a real problem to solve. How to set things right when youth's bright vision proclaimed that nothing was wrong.

THE BIG MAN in the fringed buckskin outfit and coonskin cap, with the bushy tail hanging down from it in back, walked slowly along the busy city street. His broad brown face looked troubled. He had tried to carry his long rifle sideways over his arm, but he found that people bumped into it. He did not like the experience, and had said so, and now he carried the gun over his shoulder. His powder horn flapped slightly against his hip. The hard pavement hurt his moccasin-clad feet.

Most people took little notice of him. Others looked at him, occasionally turning to glance back. A girl giggled. A few people made remarks, such as, "I don't know how far they'll carry this Davy Crockett thing."

A police officer stepped up to the big man and asked, "You got a license to walk around like this?"

The big man drawled, "License? Do you got to have a license just to walk around?"

"You do when you're carrying a gun on the city streets, concealed or not," the officer informed him.

There are a good many Davy Crocketts around these days, great and small. But though the memory and the glory of Davy have been sweeping the Nation for almost two years now, we're quite sure that only Theodore Pratt—whose fine novels have made him a writer of considerable fame and stature—would have dared to revisit the Alamo in a fantasy wholly magical, and to place Davy once again—coonskin cap and all—at the hub of a young lad's shining imagination.

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The tall man sounded bewildered. "I just fail to understand."

"Let me see that thing," the officer commanded. He reached out to take the rifle. The big man, for an instant, held it back. Then, with a scowl, he let it go.

The officer examined it curiously, then returned it with some disgust. "I guess you can't do any harm with *that* thing."

"I got no intention to do anybody harm," the tall man replied, "but I can hit a bear at—"

"Well, you go find yourself a bear. Maybe at the zoo. But get off my beat. What's your name, anyway?"

"My name's Crockett."

"Crockett?"

"David Crockett."

The officer gave him a look.

"Familiar-like," the big man continued, "I'm known as Davy Crockett. There's no reason why that should surprise you."

The officer commented, "My kid plays he's Davy Crockett, too."

"But I am—"

"Sure, sure. And pretty soon a publicity guy is going to come along here with a reporter and a photographer and they'll get your picture for the paper and this Crockett business will get bigger than ever. Only I won't be in your picture and have people laugh at me. Let them laugh at you alone."

"I don't know all you're talking about," the big man said, "but it ain't just like that."

"If it ain't, then you're pretty old to go around in an outfit like this."

"I'm truly Davy Crockett and nobody else."

The officer looked at him again. "Move on," he instructed, "before I do something about you."

The big man moved on. He came to a store whose large window was filled with Davy Crockett clothing, caps, and all appurtenances, including knock-down miniature log cabins and replicas of the Alamo. Going inside, he was approached by a young male clerk, who smiled slightly when he asked, "What can I do for you, sir?"

The tall man smiled back at this friendly greeting, which was the first one he had received. "Well," he said, "I need a thing."

The clerk examined him and smiled some more when he said, "You look as if you have about everything in the Crockett line. I'm afraid our log cabins wouldn't quite fit you. And our Alamos aren't large enough, either."

The big man shook his head, making his coonskin cap tail waggle slightly. "I don't want anything like that. I need to know a thing."

"Yes, sir?" asked the clerk politely, but still unable not to smile.

"I'd sure like to know why people are doing this to me."

"Doing what?" asked the clerk.

"Well, for one thing, having their young ones get rigged up in my clothes."

The clerk stared. His smile began

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to leave his face, but it quickly returned. "Your clothes?"

"And the second thing is telling all these lies about me. How I could make shots no human being could make even if he was right on top of a target. And how I could grin a coon out of a tree. And kill a bear when I was three years old and later how I could just look a bear to death, didn't have to shoot him at all. I don't like being misrepresented like that. I don't like that way of doing things at all."

"You don't?"

"And then making all these things of mine and selling them."

"The Crockett Craze."

"Is that what they call it?"

"Well," said the clerk, "if you don't mind my saying so, you seem to be a part of it." He laughed.

"Me? But I'm Davy Crockett."

The clerk's smile was even broader now. Lowering his voice, he advised, "You don't have to put it on with me."

"Put it on?"

"You're from the Crockett Manufacturing Company, of course," said the clerk. "And a very good gag, too. I'll sell our Crockett goods even faster than the way they've been going."

"No, no," protested the big man. "I ain't—" He stopped. "But might be this company that makes these things can tell me what I want to know. Can you give me their address?"

"I don't get it." the clerk said. "Unless you were hired by an agency downtown and want to go out to the Company's office to collect your pay. Is that it?"

The big man nodded. "You got it right."

The clerk gave him the address, saying, "It's way over on the other side of the city. You got a car?"

"Car?"

"Automobile."

"Them are the things out there making the smell and noise?"

The clerk sighed, and instructed, "You can take a B bus."

"I'll walk."

"It's a long walk."

"I'm used to walking."

It took the tall man the better part of an hour to reach the large red brick building housing the Crockett Manufacturing Company. His feet were sore, from the hard pavement, by the time he reached there. He entered the office of this concern. Through glass panels could be seen a large space where the busy manufacture of synthetic Davy Crockett buckskin outfits, synthetic coonskin caps, cardboard powder horns, and wooden long rifles was proceeding frantically.

A man sitting at a large desk looked up and said, "Well, if it ain't Davy himself."

"Sir," replied the tall man, "I want to thank you for knowing who I am."

"I could mistake that?" asked the manufacturer.

"I heard about what was going

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on. People who arrived lately where I . . ." He stopped.

"Arrived where?"

"Oh, where I live, or, rather, stay now. They told me. And I had a hankering to see it for myself. I obtained permission to return for a time and look around so I could find out why this was going on."

Indulgently, the man inquired, "What do you want to know?"

"Why are you doing such as this?"

"What do you think? To make dough, large amounts of lettuce. And I'm making it."

"But do you think you got the right to use the name of Davy Crockett the way you are doing?"

"Look, Davy ain't copyrighted. He's in the public domain, see? He don't own himself any more. He's a public figure. And I'm making him more public, more famous. I don't see what he's kicking about."

"But I don't like myself done to in this way, commercialized-like," the big man protested. "It—well, it ain't nice. It's cheap, downright cheap and not according to decency."

The Crockett manufacturer rose and came out from behind his desk. "I'll admit my goods ain't maybe like your get-up there, but mine are better than most." He fingered Davy's jacket. "Say, that's real buckskin. And your cap's real coon. And that rifle, it's the real thing, too, ain't it, along with the powder horn."

"Of course," said the tall man.

The manufacturer had been studying him closely. "Well, let's get down to business. I'll admit your approach was good. Got my attention right away. You dead-panned it fine; bet you're an actor out of work." He laughed, and the big man noted he was the second person to laugh at him, not counting the girl who had giggled.

"But I'll tell you what," the manufacturer continued, "I can't use you for an ad. And you want to know why? Because business is too good. I can't handle any more. Come around when business begins to fall off and maybe I'll hire you. Sure, come to see me then and I'll give you a job. You can walk around downtown with my name hanging from your neck."

Shortly, the tall man answered, "I'm thanking you, but that ain't what I want."

"What's the matter? Not good enough for you?"

"In all humility," the big man replied, "that is correct. I don't aim to think of myself as a historical American figure, but others have seen fit to make me so. It being like that, I believe you and such should get more respect for the name of Davy Crockett."

"We got all the respect in the world," the manufacturer said. "In fact, every night I get down on my hands and knees and say a prayer of thanks to Davy Crockett."

"I ain't had the hearing of you," the big man informed him. "And I figure if your heart was in the

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right place and you prayed the way you say, it would of reached me."

The manufacturer now gazed at him in quizzical fashion. "You know something?" he asked. "I think you got yourself really believing you're Davy Crockett and you're going around pretending you're him. That ain't good. It ain't good for my business and you better stop it. And speaking of respect for Davy, that ain't any way to show respect and right now let me tell you I couldn't use you no matter how bad business got. You better beat it before I call the man with the net."

The big man left. He walked to Washington, D. C., and looked up one of the Congressmen from Tennessee, who was quite happy to see him, even after he introduced himself and said, "You're holding the self same job I once had."

Indulgently, the Congressman observed, "So you're Davy Crockett. Glad to know you, Davy." They shook hands. A slightly glassy look then came to the Congressman's eyes, as if, belatedly, he had fully realized something. But he went on smoothly, "I've had all kinds of constituents call on me, but never one such as you. It is an honor to have you here. I only hope I can fulfill my duties as a Congressman from Tennessee as well as you did, Davy."

"You can start," said the big man, "by putting a stop right off to this Crockett Craze."

The Congressman looked horrified. "Put a stop to it?" he cried. He shook his head. "I don't know as I would want to do that, Davy."

"You mean," the tall man demanded, "you got to thinking it's good?"

"In a way," the Tennessee Congressman temporized, "it's a pretty good thing, pretty good. Makes our state known around a good deal, gets it mentioned here and there on such things as the films, the radio, and TV."

"What are them things?"

The Congressman gazed at him for a moment before proceeding, "Thanks to you, Davy, it's good for the tourist business, too. And excellent for attracting other business to Tennessee; makes people think the people of Tennessee are as honest and straightforward as you, Davy."

"Well, ain't they?"

"Of course, of course!"

Stiffly, the big man stated, "Still, I can't help but think the Crockett Craze is a downright insult to me."

"Well, now," said the Congressman, "I wouldn't look at it exactly that way, Davy. I think you can take it as a compliment as much as anything. Have you tried to think of it like that?"

"Such would be a hard thing to do," said the tall man, "while other people are making money out of it, using my name in such a way."

"You mean you'd like to be in on it yourself?" inquired the Congressman.

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"Nothing like that," said the tall man. "I don't aim to have any use for making money."

"Independently wealthy already, is that it?"

"You might say so," the big man admitted. "In a manner of speaking."

"Well, Davy, that must be pretty comfortable."

"If they paid all this attention to me," explained the big man, "without making anything out of it, it would be right fine. But that ain't the state of affairs."

"Times change," the Congressman pointed out reasonably. "Values have been altered since your day, Davy. I sympathize with your ethics carried over from another time. They are on a much higher plane than those of today. But I'm afraid not too practical now. I'm sure you'll realize that when you think it over. Now if you'll give your name and—I mean, that is, your address to my secretary as you leave, I know you'll be interested in receiving some campaign literature when I come up for reelection, Davy."

The Congressman looked at the big man again and laughed, as though he had wanted to laugh before but had only got around to it now, unable to contain himself longer.

The big man, wishing that everybody wouldn't laugh at him, found himself eased out to the outer office. Here a young lady solemnly took down his name. She didn't even look up when she asked for his address and the first thing he thought to answer was, "Last one I had here was the Alamo, San Antonio, Texas."

The tall man thought he would go and see if the Davy Crockett Craze had reached the shrine of Texas liberty. While walking to San Antonio he kept off the hard pavements and this was a lot easier on his feet.

There were not many people in the ruins of the Alamo when he arrived. Only a few tourists wandered about the ancient monument. One of these was a young boy clad in Davy Crockett costume. His phony coonskin cap was too large and fell over his eyes occasionally, while his fake rifle was too small. But these imperfections made no difference to his fierce pride in having them. He had evidently become separated from his parents. He saw the big man and demanded shrilly, "What's the idea?"

The big man asked, "What do you mean, son?"

"I mean you all dressed up like Davy."

"But, son," the tall man told him, "I'm Davy."

"You? Huh!"

"I really am. I'm Davy Crockett."

"No, you ain't. You can't be."

"Why not?"

"Because I'm him."

"I don't mind your saying so, son, because your heart is pure, not like that of those who made that shoddy costume for you."

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"Aw, you ain't Davy."

The big man smiled. "Yes, I am. Right over there is where I died. Why, it's just like yesterday here. We had run out of ammunition. All we had was our rifles to use as clubs, and our knives. We kept killing Santa Anna's men, hundreds of them, but he kept sending them in. There were just too many for us."

"I know all that," the boy said.

"You do? Now, ain't that nice?" The big man pointed to another spot. "And speaking of knives, there is where James Bowie died. He was the one who invented the Bowie knife, which is named after him."

"You don't have to tell *me!*" cried the boy. He whipped out his own small Bowie knife and brandished it before restoring it to its sheath at his belt. Then he stared at the big man. "You had me going there for a minute, Mister, but you ain't any more. Cause you ain't Davy Crockett. Why, you don't even look like him. Anybody can see that."

The tall man asked softly, "You don't think so?"

"And you better stop going around hurting Davy."

"Hurting him?"

"By pretending you're him. People will laugh at you like they was laughing at Davy. You're hurting him doing that, ain't you?"

Slowly, the big man answered, "Yes, son, I guess I am. And I expect I couldn't ever find out what I came to learn, anyway."

"Sure you couldn't, whatever that is. Davy Crockett!" the youngster shrilled scornfully, his voice sounding hollowly in the emptiness of the Alamo, just the way it had sounded once long ago when Davy's name was called. "You ain't him!" The boy raised his tiny wooden rifle. "You're a bear and I'm going to kill you!"

"You mean," the big man asked, "you're Davy Crockett and you're fixing to kill your bear?"

"That's what! And if I don't kill him with my rifle I'll kill him with a good hard look! So get ready!"

The big man smiled broadly now. "Maybe," he whispered. "I found out what I came for, after all. And I'm glad to have you be Davy Crockett, son. Why, I expect I'm downright proud to be remembered like you and all the rest are doing."

Davy raised his tiny wooden rifle all the way and began to shoot, calling loudly, "Bang! Bang!"

The big man pretended to duck, and then he ran, with Davy after him, shooting steadily. Davy chased him right out the front of the Alamo and there he stopped, for his oversize coonskin cap dropped over his eyes. He pushed it up and then stared about in the bright sunlight, astonished. No one was there.

Little Davy looked around, puzzled. "I got him, all right," he said. "But where'd he go?"

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the man who had spiders

by . . . Roger Dee

There is probably more than one way of curing a tragic addiction to alcohol. But Adrian's way was as shuddery as a smiling Medusa.

WHEN Mr. Marcus, who had sold novelties to novelty shops for forty years and so had lost the capacity for astonishment at human unpredictability, returned to Maysville on the 8:04 train for his regular April week of selling, he went at once to Mrs. Ponder's boarding house and found Kitty playing Delibes on the living-room piano.

It was almost like coming home, Mr. Marcus thought with an uncharacteristic twinge of nostalgia. He paused for a moment in the doorway, suitcase and sample bag and his inevitable parcel of books in hand, to listen.

Tender was the word for Kitty, with her cool, sure touch on the Delibes theme and her clear blind eyes and her nestling of fair hair that just brushed her shoulders. And wasted, Mr. Marcus thought, with all the beauty and the talent of her shunted to obscurity in the dingy gentility of her mother's menage.

If he were thirty years younger—

Mr. Marcus cut the thought dead. *If you were thirty years younger, Marcus,* he told himself with dry

All too modestly, we feel, has Roger Dee tried to shrug off his undoubted kinship to Saki—that master of whimsical fantasy supreme—in this ebulliently breathtaking excursion into a realm as darkly mysterious as it is irresistibly enchanting. Adrian's spiders may make your flesh crawl. But we predict you'll like Adrian himself quite as much as did Mr. Marcus, and rejoice in his triumph.

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cynicism, *you'd travel and sell novelties. Just as you did thirty years ago.*

Kitty sensed his presence with the near-tactile acuity of the blind and let the Delibes theme trail off in a random tinkle.

"It's only I, Miss Kitty," Mr. Marcus said. "The old man who sells loaded cigars to idiots."

She turned on the piano bench, pleased at his coming but nevertheless disappointed. "Oh, Mr. Marcus. I thought at first you were Adrian."

"Adrian?"

She laughed, a sound as light and clear as the vanished music. "Adrian Hall, our new boarder. He's only been with us a week."

A week. Seven days, Mr. Marcus thought, and her face could light up so at the sound of his step?

When Kitty smiled it was impossible to think that her eyes could not see him. "You're thinking that my interest is unusual, and you're quite right. But Adrian is an unusual man, Mr. Marcus."

"I'm sure he is," Mr. Marcus said cautiously. "I'll have to meet him."

The prospect pleased her. "You were always nice to me and Jay Kirby because I'm blind and Jay has fits, but you never noticed anyone else. You'll notice Adrian. You'll like him."

"I'm sure I shall," Mr. Marcus said. Her eagerness made him feel old and tired and somehow resentful. The books and bags grew heavy in his hands. "I was just going upstairs to see if my room—"

Kitty's face lighted up. "Please wait," she begged. "I hear Adrian coming down now. We're going out for a drive, but I'd like you to meet him first."

The new boarder was perhaps thirty, hardly older than Kitty, and totally unremarkable. Shaking hands, Mr. Marcus cast back through the dry files of his memory and exhausted them without turning up a more ordinary face or figure. Moderately tall, he catalogued: average build, plain face, neutral hair, good teeth and mild blue eyes. The man's only distinction seemed to be a round, black mole on the left side of his neck, half hidden by his shirt collar. Politely, Mr. Marcus did not look at it twice.

It rather startled him to discover that Kitty had been right. He *did* like Adrian Hall, at first sight and without reservation.

Mr. Marcus was never quite sure what was said during the shaking of hands. He was too absorbed in trying to justify such uncharacteristic regard to do more than nod when Adrian excused himself to hold Kitty's light coat for her. He did retain a bizarre impression when the two of them went out, however, that the new boarder's mole had shifted from the side to the back of his neck and was watching him with an air of amiable curiosity.

The conviction left Mr. Marcus

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more annoyed than disturbed. He'd have to see an oculist and have his lenses changed again, he told himself resignedly as he climbed the stairs to his room.

Jay Kirby was waiting there for him, crouched against the farther wall like a fearful puppy hiding from the adult pack.

No other boarder in Mrs. Ponder's house would have dared violate Mr. Marcus' privacy, but Jay enjoyed the privilege of handicap and exercised it. Mr. Marcus sighed when he saw that Jay was suffering, or had just suffered, another of his periodic attacks. His corn-colored hair was wildly tousled, his blue eyes had fallen two octaves darker with stress and there was a wide smear of grime across one sweating cheek.

Jay was far too badly shaken to bother with greetings. "You got to do something about this Adrian Hall," he blurted. "Mr. Marcus, he's got *spiders.*"

Mr. Marcus found the proposition as repellent as it was improbable. Still, the turn of Jay's latest fantasy intrigued him. Large spiders or small, he wondered, gray or black, poisonous or innocuous, caged or—"

"Spiders?" He put his books and bags on the bed. "In his room, you mean?"

Jay denied it violently. "On *him.*"

Mr. Marcus wondered with some bitterness if nations would ever outgrow their penchant for expedient wars that left men broken as Jay Kirby was broken. Left alone Jay would have been a pleasant young man and a first-rate musician, but with the spirit of him maimed and trembling like a frightened child's at the edge of nightmare—

Mr. Marcus opened his suitcase. "I brought you a record, Jay—something just released. A New Orleans stomp, the music-shop man said, with an alto sax that—"

Jay came across the room and clutched his arm, towering over him. "I didn't shuck my wig this time, Mr. Marcus, honest. I really saw this. The guy had his clothes off, and he was all over spiders."

Mr. Marcus felt a touch of chill. Jay had been committed twice before coming to rest at Mrs. Ponder's; if he were sent away again, it might be for good.

"Sit down," Mr. Marcus said. He sat down himself, on the room's one chair. "Tell me about it, Jay, and from the beginning."

Jay sat on the bed, and rose, and sat again. "It'd be all right if he'd keep them to himself," he said. "I wouldn't mind that because I *like* him. It's Miss Kitty I'm worried about."

"Miss Kitty?"

"Everybody likes Adrian, Mr. Marcus, but Miss Kitty's in love with him. How'll she feel when she finds out he's got spiders?"

Mr. Marcus nodded gravely. "I can understand your concern. But Miss Kitty is blind, Jay. How can she find out?"

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"I thought you'd see that right off," Jay said, disappointed. "She'll know when they get married, won't she? She'll *have* to know."

Mr. Marcus permitted himself a small shudder. Jay had outdone himself this time.

"You saw these spiders, you said," he reminded. "Where, and when?"

Jay got up and paced restlessly, limping. "Half an hour ago, when Adrian went up to shower and dress for his date with Miss Kitty. I was out on the porch roof, tightening a loose bathroom shutter I'd promised to fix for Mrs. Ponder, and—"

"You spied on him, Jay? In the *bathroom?*"

"I didn't mean to," Jay said defensively. "But I couldn't look away after I saw the spiders. Could you?" He turned a stricken face to Mr. Marcus. "Mr. Marcus, he was all covered with them until he stepped into the shower. Then he held up a towel and they jumped on it to keep dry."

"I see," Mr. Marcus said. "And when he came out?"

"He dried himself off," Jay said. "And they jumped on again." He began to tremble with the violence of imminent seizure. "What am I going to do, Mr. Marcus? I like Adrian, but I like Miss Kitty, too. I can't let him—"

Mr. Marcus rose hastily and led him to his room down the hall. "You won't have to do anything," he promised before he left Jay to have his fit in privacy. "Trust me, Jay. I'll take care of it."

It was not until later, when he had settled himself in his own room to a volume of Saki's inhumanly perfect short stories, that he remembered the new boarder's peregrinating mole.

"Can't happen outside fiction," he assured himself. "Tricks of the eyes, or else the fellow has two moles."

But his eyesight was disturbingly good when he went down to breakfast next morning at seven and found himself seated beside Adrian Hall. Adrian was neatly dressed for work. He was a newspaper reporter, it developed, and was thinking seriously of launching a weekly of his own in Maysville—and he was every whit as likeable as he had been on the night before.

But not as unremarkable. This morning, he had no moles at all.

FORTY YEARS of selling novelties and reading books had not prepared Mr. Marcus for the role of detective that was thrust upon him, but it had given him a certain resourcefulness. Between stock-taking calls at local shops during the day he made discreet inquiries, and by nightfall had amassed a considerable array of fact and opinion.

The opinion was unfailingly enthusiastic. Never, Mr. Marcus thought, had a man been so instantly and universally liked in a town as small and insular as Maysville. Adrian Hall could have bor-

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rowed money from any bank, had any job or married any girl in the community.

What could make so plain a man so prepossessing Mr. Marcus could not imagine. He was certain only that he liked Mrs. Ponder's new boarder more than he had ever liked anyone in his life, and that he felt not only uncomfortable but downright guilty in spying out his personal affairs.

Actual fact was harder to arrive at. Adrian Hall had come from Kansas City, some two hundred miles distant. He was a good newspaperman and Gus Willis, who operated the Maysville *Bugler*, had liked him well enough—as who hadn't?—to hire him on sight. He was sober, industrious, efficient and considerate.

No one but Jay Kirby and Mr. Marcus seemed to suspect that he harbored spiders under his shirt. And Mr. Marcus, returning from his first day of selling and inquiry to find Adrian singing *The Rose of Tralee* with Kitty at the piano, found that repellent idea hard to believe.

Until, at supper again, he happened to look up quickly from his plate and discovered that the new boarder's elusive mole had returned. Mr. Marcus blinked and—he was quite positive, this time—it blinked genially back at him.

The conviction so unnerved him that he closed his eyes to defend his composure. When he opened them again the mole had gone, together with Mr. Marcus' lost appetite.

Mr. Marcus excused himself from table and went upstairs to his room. As he had expected, Jay Kirby was waiting for him again.

"Did you tell him?" Jay demanded.

Mr. Marcus blinked, remembered the mole that had just blinked back at him, and shuddered. "Did I tell what to whom?"

"Adrian," Jay said. "Didn't you tell him yet to get lost? How're we going to keep him away from Miss Kitty unless we threaten to expose him?"

"I couldn't do that," Mr. Marcus said. "I like him too well."

"So do I," Jay said. "Damn him."

Mr. Marcus went over the possibilities again and found nothing of promise.

"No one would believe us even if we tried to expose him," he concluded. "We wouldn't believe in his spiders ourselves if we hadn't seen them."

Jay began to sweat. "What are we going to do, Mr. Marcus? We can't brace Adrian because we like him too much, and we can't tell Miss Kitty what's wrong with him. How are we going to keep them from getting married?"

It was a formidable question. Mr. Marcus evaded it by posing one of his own.

"How do you know they'll be married, Jay? Has any announcement been made?"

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"Not yet," Jay said. "But there will be."

Mr. Marcus sighed. "Then I'm afraid we're stumped. I wish we knew more about him."

A new avenue of approach occurred to him then, but Jay anticipated the inspiration. "You could find out something about him in Kansas City," Jay said. "He was a newspaper reporter there once, wasn't he?"

Mr. Marcus could not drop his selling—he had only two days left now before he must move downstate toward St. Louis—and go to Kansas City, but he could pursue his investigation by proxy. Providentially, he had a friend on the staff of the Kansas City *Star* who might do his leg work for him.

"It seems our last hope," Mr. Marcus said. "I'll make the call now."

He preferred not to use the house telephone because of its several extensions, and the nearest booth stood in a corner of the neighborhood drugstore. Mr. Marcus went out and made his call, received his Kansas City friend's promise to do what he could, and returned to Mrs. Ponder's boarding house.

He found a small party in progress, with a beaming Mrs. Ponder and an assorted handful of her boarders gathered round Adrian Hall and Kitty. Lemonade flowed freely and an air of rejoicing prevailed.

"Congratulate me, Mr. Marcus," Kitty cried. "Adrian and I are going to be married."

Mr. Marcus congratulated them both with deepest sincerity. His scalp prickled only once during his well-wishings, when one of Adrian's—moles?—crept out of its shirt-collar, just below the Adam's apple this time, and peered at him complacently.

"God bless you both," Mr. Marcus finished, and fled upstairs.

But his room, for once, was not sanctuary.

For the first time in his life his books failed to sustain him and he felt truly alone and impotent, caught vicariously in exactly the sort of emotional muddle he had avoided so religiously. There was not even Jay Kirby to lean on in his extremity. Jay had heard the news of Kitty's engagement during Mr. Marcus' brief absence and had given way under the strain, suffering another of his fits in his own room.

Mrs. Ponder's tapping brought Mr. Marcus out of his funk, if briefly. "Telephone call for you," she said. "From Kansas City."

Mr. Marcus, knowing that Mrs. Ponder would eavesdrop if he used the upper hallway extension, took the call downstairs. It was his friend of the *Star*.

"Got the dirt you wanted right here in the office," his friend said cheerfully. "A question here, a phone call there, and it's wrapped up."

He gave his information tersely.

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"The guy's a bum, Marcus. He's been thrown off every paper in town for drinking—even Alcoholics Anonymous finally wrote him off as a lost cause."

Mr. Marcus said nothing. There were no words for what he felt.

"Wasn't ever vicious," his friend said. "He was just one of those poor fish with a twist, an uncontrollable drinker. Sponged handouts and probably stole a little on his bad days, but never robbed any banks. What's he doing up there—more of the usual?"

Mr. Marcus found his voice. "Not at all. This must be a different Adrian Hall altogether."

But it wasn't. Mr. Marcus discovered that when he went upstairs again and found Adrian waiting for him by the upper hallway extension.

"I came up and listened in," Adrian said. "I had an idea that you were checking on me, Mr. Marcus. When Mrs. Ponder told us you had a call from Kansas City, I was sure of it."

"I had to do it," Mr. Marcus said. "Once Jay had told me about your spiders, I had no choice."

Adrian took Mr. Marcus' arm and led him away down the hall. Mr. Marcus went along unprotestingly, numb with disbelief at his own composure. It was downright frightening, he thought, to find himself so unfrightened.

Adrian's room was much like Mr. Marcus' own, or like any other in the Ponder house. Adrian seated Mr. Marcus on his one chair and himself on the bed, and they measured each other equably over the flimsy expanse of Adrian's writing-table.

In any decent piece of fiction, Mr. Marcus thought, there must be some element of suspense; in fiction running to such a situation as this, even of outright horror. But somehow, being dragged to the very lair of the monster he had set out to scotch brought him no touch of uneasiness. He felt sympathetic rather than fearful, and he liked Adrian Hall more, if that were possible, than ever.

"I'm really glad you unmasked me," Adrian said. "I need help, Mr. Marcus. I need help more than I ever needed it in my life."

"I'll do anything within my power," Mr. Marcus promised. "But I'm equally interested in helping Kitty, else I wouldn't have bothered with your past at all . . . Your problem is that you can't keep your spiders and marry Kitty too, isn't it?"

Adrian nodded. "It wouldn't work. Not because Kitty might object to them, for she wouldn't—they're not really offensive, and it's no fault of their own that they're here—but because a honeymoon without privacy is no honeymoon at all. My friends are quite intelligent, not to mention inquisitive, and keeping them wouldn't be fair to either Kitty or myself."

"You could get rid of them."

"That wouldn't be fair to *them*,"

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Adrian said. "And since I'm responsible for their being here, and they're responsible for my reformation—"

He broke off apologetically. "It would be better if I told you about it from the beginning, wouldn't it?"

"It would," Mr. Marcus agreed, and settled himself to listen.

"First," Adrian said, "what your friend of the *Star* told you is perfectly true. I drank and scrounged quarters on the street and slept in gutters, not because I liked it but because I couldn't stop doing it any more than poor Jay Kirby can stop having fits. Until I got help, that is.

"I used to have the shakes regularly, like any other confirmed alcoholic. The d.t.'s can be pretty awful, you know, and my personal cross was to wake up from a binge and imagine myself all covered with spiders. It happened so many times that I lost count, and usually it meant several days in a hospital ward before I recovered.

"But one particular morning I woke up with spiders that wouldn't go away. They were real, though they weren't spiders at all, and they were anything but the horrors I'd dreamed of. They were such incredibly pleasant creatures—whatever they were, and are—that just being associated so closely with them made a new man of me overnight. I was perfectly happy until I came here and met Kitty."

"I can see they're not common or garden variety Arachnida," Mr. Marcus said. He could with justification, for two of them had perched on the rim of Adrian's collar and were observing him with a bland good-nature impossible to doubt. "You've no idea what they really are?"

"Not the faintest," Adrian said. "I'm not going to quote *Hamlet,* but a great many things happen every day in the world that no one understands. Personally, I think they were drawn here from some other plane or dimension by the strength of my obsession. I can't be sure of that because I can't talk to them, but I do feel that I'm responsible for them. And they've done so much for me that I can't just brush them off. It would be inhuman."

"You're right, of course," Mr. Marcus agreed. "But on the other hand, neither can you brush off Kitty. You're in the position of the man who couldn't go but couldn't stay."

Adrian nodded unhappily. "There you have it. Mr. Marcus, what am I going to do?"

But Mr. Marcus, unlike the Saki he had been reading, had no instant and adequate answer.

And, since the next day was his last in Maysville for the season and he could not linger on in unemployment at Mrs. Ponder's even to help the couple who had become his dearest friends, he was forced to take the 8:04 to St. Louis without having discovered any solution to Adrian's problem.

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It was a shame, Mr. Marcus thought when he was somewhere in the neighborhood of Hannibal, Missouri, that such things never seem to work out in everyday life as conveniently as they do in fiction. It was entirely possible that he might never learn the outcome of Adrian's problem, and at best he had a year to wait.

MR. MARCUS, at the end of his forty-first year of selling novelties to novelty shops, returned again to Maysville. But not immediately to Mrs. Ponder's boarding house.

A prosperously-dressed Adrian met him at the station with a conservative but handsome new station wagon. With Adrian was Kitty, still blind but lovelier than ever, and in Kitty's arms gurgled their firstborn, a boy named Marcus Jay Hall.

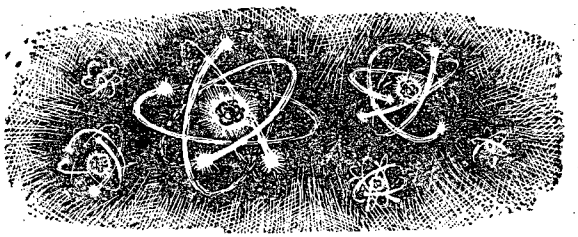
On their way to Mrs. Ponder's they passed first the offices of the Maysville *Bugler*, of which Adrian was now owner, and then the Hall's newly-financed home. A little later Adrian slowed the car to give Mr. Marcus a closer look at a neighborhood billboard advertising the excellence of Maysville's own dance band, a five-piece combo of which Jay Kirby seemed to be both originator and conductor. Jay's face, smiling and assured and with no trace of its old crippling tension, took up a large part of the poster. And a handsome face it was.

"Jay is the most popular man in Maysville nowadays," Adrian explained. "He could be mayor if he liked, but he'd rather play the saxophone."

A year had dulled Mr. Marcus' perception not at all. "You mean?" he said.

"Just so," Adrian agreed. "It worked out very well, after all. The worst of problems have a way of settling themselves without too much help, have you noticed? It was only a couple of nights after you left that Jay had another of his attacks and woke up with the conviction that he was covered with spiders. And he was, and everyone has been quite happy since."

It was a fair enough ending, Mr. Marcus granted, but his private opinion was that it lacked imagination. Saki, he felt sure, would have handled it better.



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passage to anywhere

by . . . Sam Merwin Jr.

The scientists were riding high in the saddle with U N backing. But it took a touch of genius to win the teleportation battle.

THE MOMENT Park Hamilton sat down behind his desk and saw the shocking pink envelope lying atop the neat little rectangular tower that represented his morning's mail, he felt a distinct sense of foreboding. For, while Hamilton was not psychic, in the course of his six-year tenure of the difficult office of executive operations director for Science Projects Research, he had become highly sensitive to the tumbler fallings of small events as indicative of larger patterns.

Reaching slowly for the shocking pink envelope, he tried to tell himself that it was his job that was making him jumpy. Keeping SPR together and afloat on the swirling tides of politics and opinion in a far from united world was a job that would have caused Atlas to throw down his burden in despair and face willingly the wrath of the gods. Or so Hamilton had more than once told his familiars in moments of despondency.

SPR had been born in the disturbed 1950's as a modest revolt among scientists—first in England,

Have you ever wondered what would happen if man's inventive genius should abandon space rocket construction for a more daring approach to the conquest of space? Suppose—just suppose—you could step into a matter-transmitting machine and be instantly teleported to Venus or Mars? Concede the possibility and bear in mind that a battle of political titans would have to be waged first, and we predict you won't be able to lay this story down. For Sam Merwin Jr., with his customary brilliance, has actually dared to fire the opening gun.

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then in the United States—against the nationalistic restrictions imposed upon them by governments inextricably involved in the Gilbertian paradoxes of the so-called Cold War. And, as a divided world somehow worked its way toward peace, it had grown, little by little, to include most of the truly able scientific brains on Earth.

Dedicated to the pure research few governments or industries could afford, it supported itself on a sort of ASCAP arrangement, by which its members turned over to SPR all of their royalties and were paid in return a guaranteed income according to the earnings of the more practical results of their work. Oddly enough, the plan was liked.

Ultimately, SPR had grown so unwieldy, and so rich, that Hamilton's predecessor had managed to put it loosely under the aegis of the United Nations, thus protecting the fiercely independent organization, at least in part, from nationalist pressure. The great SPR Proving and Testing Laboratories in Antarctica had been set up when the UN took mandate over that much-claimed and almost uninhabited continent.

But winning agreement to his great plan from the individualistic and anarchic SPR members had proved almost more difficult than putting through the UN and Antarctic projects. Jacques Swanson, the man responsible, had died shortly after the first ground—or rather ice—was broken south of Ross Sea. And Park Hamilton was his successor.

He had never allowed himself to believe that the job was a sinecure. But he was firmly convinced that if he had been aware of the endless problems to which it would give rise he would have shot himself before considering it. Which, as his personal assistant, Miss Alderman, invariably reminded him, was so much blather.

"You thrive on it," she told him when this mood was upon him. "You look five years younger."

"That," was his usual reply, "is because, in a Freudian sense, I'm trying to work my way back to the womb. But one of these days you'll come in here and find me quite literally curled up in a foetal position. Then what will you do?"

"Buy you a lollipop," had been her most recent retort.

All in all, a thankless business—and, opening the shocking pink envelope, Hamilton had a definite hunch that the day ahead was going to be even more thankless than usual.

His foreboding was based on a number of things. Each of them was small in itself, but in toto, they shaped up to a pattern he disliked. First, for several days, everything connected with SPR had been running far too smoothly. No member scientist had come up with a demand for a half billion dollars to build a machine that would take him under the Earth's crust.

Moreover, no greedy power had

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been plotting in the UN Assembly to subvert to its own use the discovery of one of its nationals, solely to avoid paying SPR patent royalties. And no major industrial cartel had been stirring up trouble, charging scientist-slavery, from the same motives.

What was even more suspicious and disturbing, the reliable Miss Alderman had not yet arrived at her office—and had not phoned in an explanation. Shirley, the Eurasian receptionist, had given him this information quite casually on the way in.

And on top of that, Hamilton had walked under a ladder coming off the high-level ramp, where some rim repairmen had been fixing a warped edge on the helicoptor roof. This last occurrence was the most annoying, because Hamilton *knew* it was foolishness and superstition. Yet he could not help feeling as he did.

Now—the shocking pink envelope. Its color alone indicated two things. One, that it was an emergency message from Antarctica too vital to be entrusted to the usual coding channels. And two, that it must have come in during the past half hour—since he had left his apartment uptown. Otherwise it would have been relayed to him there. He was sure it could only mean trouble.

It read: SRYAN OFF HELIJET CIRCA 2200 EDST. VACATION TIME. HAMESSAGE RESTRAINING TOO LATE. WHEREABOUTS UNKNOWN —CANTSPR. Translated, it meant that S. Ryan had taken off in a helijet about 10 p.m., New York time, on an overdue vacation. A message from Hamilton asking that he delay his departure had arrived too late. Ryan's present whereabouts was not known. Chief, Antarctic Science Projects Research.

Hamilton said, "Damn!" in very forcible accents. Then, deciding the oath was still too mild and too trite for the occasion, he added a few more lurid expletives in several languages, including the Portuguese. These last he had picked up while doing a job as consulting biologist on the Amazon Delta Reclamation Plan—where his work had won him admission to SPR, class AAAA, and had led directly to his present job.

He flipped the visicommunicator switch to Miss Alderman's office, and received in return nothing but a blank screen. He next switched over to Shirley, the receptionist, and was instantly rewarded with a view of her flowerlike Eurasian face. She said, "Miss Alderman's apartment does not answer. And she has not called in."

He flipped off with a scowl and lit a cigarette. His foreboding had been justified. He wondered just how his message to Ryan had been bungled in Antarctica. Or had Ryan simply defied restraint and taken off, and were Cantspr, Witherspoon and the rest down there covering for him? Exhaling wearily, he decided he could hardly

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blame either Witherspoon and his able staff, or Ryan himself.

Sven Ryan was an inventor and a man of genius. As an inventor he had just successfully tested what might well prove the most important single development in human gadgetry since the long-haired discovery of the wheel. And, as a genius, he had to be given *some* leeway. But Ryan, free-roaming and talking just now—Hamilton tried but failed to suppress a shudder at the thought.

The visicommunicator hummed and he flipped it on again, hoping it would be the sorely needed Miss Alderman. Instead, it was Shirley. Impassively she announced in her sweet, thin voice, "Mr. Harris of the UN is here to see you, sir."

"Dammit, I *know* Mr. Harris is from the UN!" Hamilton exploded. Then, noting her hurt look, "I'm sorry, Shirley. You're not the target of my wrath. Send him in."

Ian Harris, as SPR high-level liaison man for the United Nations, had been working closely with Hamilton for almost five years. They had traveled together, wined and dined together both in public and private, golfed together, and explored each other's minds and opinions in the closest harmony for hundreds of hours. And yet, at moments such as this, Harris had the knack of putting Hamilton on the defensive.

Hamilton knew he was the better looking. He had viewed himself too many times on too many color projection screens to have any doubts on that score. But his gray-tipped brown hair looked faintly theatrical when contrasted with Harris' cropped black head, and his upper lip looked naked beside the other man's neat black mustache. What was even more disconcerting, his features looked looser and more florid, his clothes not nearly so well fitting.

As usual, when Harris entered with a brisk nod Hamilton was annoyed to find the refrain of *There'll Always Be an England* running through his head. He said, "Hello, Ian," waved him to a chair and offered him a cigarette with a defensive geniality.

The Englishman shook his head, settled back with a sigh and regarded his host with an I-say-old-man-is-this-exactly-cricket? expression. It occurred to Hamilton that Harris looked at the moment as sad as a Georgia hound dog whose master had eaten up all the steak.

The silence lasted until Hamilton said, with a trace of irritation he hated himself for revealing, "Ian, if you came over here to put the evil eye on me, I earnestly suggest that you go back to your own office? Let *me* be *your* guest."

The UN representative regarded Hamilton as if he were some animal of a rarely photographed and inexplicable new species. Then he said, mildly, "Park, I find it difficult at times to convince certain regrettably backward branches of our organization that SPR is not a

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malignant wild growth upon the human social organism—a growth primarily dedicated to the development of disruptive discoveries without regard to their probable effect upon the structure of our society as a whole."

"For heaven's sake, get to the point, Ian," said Hamilton. "We've been over this a thousand times before. It's the job of SPR's scientists to invent what comes bubbling up to the surface of their perhaps oddly constructed minds. It's my job—and yours—to fit them into the socio-economic pattern."

Harris regarded him with a mute disapproval that made Hamilton feel like a small boy caught cheating in a grade-school test. The UN man said, "Do you really think you're doing your job, old man?"

"I'm doing my best," said Hamilton, knowing that the toreador capework was about over and the moment of truth about to arrive.

"I'm sure you are." Having made his point, Harris was disposed to be conciliatory. "But what about this Ryan business?"

Hamilton sighed, and pushed the shocking pink envelope across the desk. "There it is," he said simply. "Somebody goofed. I sent out a restraining order under special code the moment I heard that Ryan's tests were successful."

Harris glanced at the message, frowned, and tossed it back on the desk. "Rough luck, Park," he said. Then, "Has it occurred to you what it could mean if word gets out generally that this mad genius of yours has developed an instantaneous matter-transmitter?"

"How did *you* hear of it?" Hamilton asked, instantly suspicious, and remembering that it was absolutely against the UN-SPR pact for the UN to have an informant in Antarctica.

To Hamilton's amazement, the usually imperturbable Harris countenance turned a bright pink. He thought, *If I'm not skinned alive over this it will have been worth it—just to see Ian blush. But what is he hiding?*

The UN man said, with seeming clairvoyance, "It's not what you think. I—er—picked it up quite inadvertently. I happened to stumble across your man Ryan late last night."

"If you did," said Hamilton seriously, "why in the name of heaven didn't you clamp on to him?"

"I tried to," was the reply. "But the circumstances were not exactly propitious."

"Ryan at complete liberty in New York!" Hamilton groaned. "Was he talking?"

"If he was keeping silent," said Harris, his face resuming its normal pale tan, "would I be here now? I tell you, Park, this may be more serious than you think. I'm qualified to understand his ravings—an ability not shared by many, thank God. But there's no way of telling how much harm has been done."

"Have you taken steps?" Hamilton asked, wishing he had looked

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up before walking under that ladder.

Harris nodded. "I've put our UN force on the job. But what can they do? There are only a few score of them. Even if they locate him, they have no real jurisdiction outside of UN territory. All your man has to do is tell them to push off." He paused, then added, "I came over here to discover your attitude and what steps *you* are taking."

"Thanks, Ian," said Hamilton. Harris didn't have to detail what it could mean if word got out that a successful instantaneous matter-transmitter had been discovered. It could mean world-wide financial and economic catastrophe. It could mean disaster for every other form of freight and cargo transportation on Earth, from the great rocket airliners with their chains of freight-gliders to the humblest obsolescent tramp steamer plying the ocean waves.

Hearing of it prematurely, people wouldn't wait to learn its limitations, or the bugs that would have to be worked out before it could be put into operation. They'd dump their stocks and property investments and gilt-edged bonds and the result might well be world-wide chaos.

"We'll do our very best, never fear," said Hamilton, accompanying Harris to the office door.

But, returning to his desk, he wondered just what they could do. To put either the New York City police or the Federal Authorities on the job would be an iron-clad way of opening up a leak. It was one hell of a mess. He sat down behind his desk, put his face in his hands, and tried desperately to think of something. Nothing came.

The visicommunicator hummed its little tune, and wearily he turned it on again. Miss Alderman's trim, competent face appeared on the screen. He said, "Just where have *you* been?"

She said, "I only this minute got home—and I've got the mad Minnesotan with me. *Chief,* are you okay?"

II

HAMILTON'S first reaction was one of utter disbelief. He said, "You've *what,* Nancy? If by any chance this is a joke—"

"It's not," Miss Alderman assured him crisply. "How do you think I got these rings under my eyes? Sven Ryan is sleeping it off right here in my apartment. I didn't dare turn on my communicator until he passed out."

"But where, and how did you ever get hold of *him?*" asked Hamilton, still half-incredulous.

"Maybe you'd better come right over here, Chief," she said. "I'll explain when you get here. Do you know where I live?"

"I do—and I'm on my way." When Miss Alderman switched off, he flipped Shirley's switch, and informed her he was leaving the office. "Call Mr. Harris and tell

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him everything is under control," he directed.

He left by the private door, thus avoiding the reception room and any potential holdups in the outer office. Emerging on the high-level ramp, he looked about warily for the rim repairmen and their ladder, and was relieved to discover that they had finished their work, and gone elsewhere.

Since Miss Alderman, like everyone on SPR except its few top echelon members, lived within a mile of the Zeckendorf Plaza offices, Hamilton hopped a ramp-conveyor that carried him with gratifying celerity and an equally gratifying smoothness across the bottomless canyons of the incredible city.

In less than fifteen minutes he had arrived at a high-level port in her own building, close to the lean green rectangle of Central Park. About him, unnoticed, passed the ever-changing kaleidoscopic vista of Manhattan with its familiar but fantastic metal and glass complexes of polychromatic spires, pyramids, ziggurats and domes.

Although the trip had been incredibly brief, Miss Alderman looked as crisply and as trimly brunette as she had on the day when she had first stepped into his office to take up her difficult assignment as his personal secretary. Evidently she had found time to do a quite miraculous repair job on the circles under her eyes.

He put an arm around her shoulders, and gave her a quick squeeze. He said, "If I forgot to say thanks over the communicator—thanks now, Nancy." He stood back, looking at her with open admiration. "*How?*" he asked her.

"Have some coffee," she suggested, flushing with pleasure.

She poured him a steaming black cupful from a glasspresso living-room machine which was one of SPR's most profitable patents. As they sat down, Hamilton could hear the faint sound of snoring from behind the closed bedroom door. He lifted an eyebrow, and nodded toward the sound. Miss Alderman nodded in return.

"I'm waiting," said Hamilton.

"Well," she began, marshalling her thoughts and words with care, "I was sound asleep in my beauty-pad when I got a call on the communicator. It must have been just about three a.m. It was one of the girls in compo-filing. She was watching a night club mike-jockey and she told me that Sven Ryan had just appeared on the screen, and wasn't he supposed to be in Antarctica? It seems she filed your restraining message yesterday afternoon."

"Good girls, both of you," said Hamilton warmly.

To his surprise, Miss Alderman choked on her coffee. For some reason, her reaction reminded him of Ian Harris' inexplicable embarrassment in his office earlier.

When she had recovered herself, Miss Alderman said, "I'm sorry,

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Chief. But I think you'll understand when I tell you that by the time I got myself together and over to the club our crazy genius was sitting at a table swathed in three of Molly Sadler's choicest items—one blonde, one redhead, and one brunette. You never saw such—er—figures."

Hamilton could not help smiling. His use of the phrase *good girls* in even remote connotation with any of Molly Sadler's justly renowned Cyprians was more than amusing. He said, "You underrate me, Nancy. How did Ryan react when he saw you?"

"It was odd." She told him. "Mind you, he was very drunk, and by the time I managed to get him halfway reassembled he couldn't remember any of it. But I'd be willing to swear he said, 'Lord! Another vulture! And I fled Antarctica to get away from all of you. But where's your black mustache?' "

She stroked her perfectly smooth upper lip, looking faintly troubled. Then she said, "I don't have a mustache, do I, Chief?"

He replied, "No, of course not, but Ia—" He caught it barely in time. And, in spite of himself, he grimaced, envisioning what must have happened. Evidently Ryan, loaded and ready for "tiger hunting," had headed for Molly Sadler's famous non-home and discovered the impeccable, imperturbable, and immovable Ian Harris already there.

"What's the matter, Chief?" Miss Alderman stared at him with curiosity snapping in her wide-set black eyes.

"Nothing," said Alderman. "Tell you later. How did you manage to get him away from the bevy? From what I've heard about Molly's girls—" He let it hang.

"Chief, all I can tell you after last night is that everything you hear isn't half the truth," she said solemnly. "If I had a quarter of the—well, I'll just say that if I had a certain kind of glamor I'd never have wasted a fourth of my life becoming college-trained to spend the best years of my youth behind a desk—even a very nice desk."

"You'll do—anywhere," he told her. Then, frowning, "Among the interesting things I've heard about Molly's girls is that some of them have college degrees too. Was Ryan talking?"

"He certainly was," said Miss Alderman promptly. "He was beguiling his harem with promises to ship each of them an Antarctic rock-diamond every week, by instant teleportation."

"Oh, God!" said Hamilton. "Let's hope these particular girls have extremely low IQ's. They could be the exact opposite of the intellectual type."

"I wouldn't bet on it, Chief," was Miss Alderman's reply. "Though it doesn't seem quite fair, when you come right down to it."

"How did you get him away from them?" he asked.

She shook her close-cut dark-

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haired head. "If I hadn't been full of outraged righteousness, if I'd stopped to think twice, I'd never have made it," she admitted. "I just marched in and led poor Sven out by the ear. It was a high-handed, somewhat unworthy trick—at least he seemed to think so once I had him under wraps. I'm beginning to think so myself."

"Get hold of yourself, Nancy," said Hamilton, rising. "You've done a SPR a very great service. How'd you keep him here?"

"Not the way you think," she said promptly. "By the time I got him here he was running out of steam. He wanted to talk—and go on drinking. He's a pretty nice guy, you know. It took me all the rest of the night to get him folded up." She paused, then added, "Chief, is this new item of his as hot as he claims?"

"Ian Harris was in my office just now, having catfits over it," said Hamilton. "Potentially, it's the hottest potato SPR has ever come up with. And we've had to handle some pretty sizzling ones, remember?"

"I remember," said Miss Alderman.

Hamilton rose. He said, "I think we'd better wake Ryan up. We can't let him sleep here indefinitely."

"Why, Chief!" asked Miss Alderman, standing to reveal a trim if not opulent figure.

"I'm not, at the moment, concerned about your reputation," he told her, inwardly damning all women for their tendency to coyness at the wrong moments. "What I am concerned with is Ryan and his—"

The doorbell chimed sharply. After a swift, silent interchange, Miss Alderman answered it. Rather expecting Ian Harris to have run them to earth, Hamilton was not wholly surprised at the appearance of a huge, burly man with bushy black eyebrows and a ruggedly handsome face.

Face and body belonged to Charles Forsythe, Undersecretary of Science and Industry in the Cabinet of the President of the United States and one of the world's wealthiest and most powerful individuals. It is perhaps needless to add that he was, incidentally, SPR's deadliest foe in the name of private enterprise.

Miss Alderman turned to stare at Hamilton, her expression bewildered and uncertain.

Hamilton said, quietly, "Come in, Charlie. Come in. I'm glad to see you."

"Glad to see you, too, Park," said Forsythe. The two men eyed each other with the restrained wariness of polite jungle cats. Then Forsythe's mouth twitched and Hamilton found himself laughing with the intruder. *Confound the man!* he thought. It was a hell of a note when you couldn't stay mad at your enemies.

Actually, Forsythe's sudden emergence in the already complex

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problem of Sven Ryan and his matter-transmitter was an element Hamilton had been hoping they could avoid ever since Ian Harris had told him Ryan was at liberty in New York and talking his head off. But, since Forsythe was already here . . .

Hamilton said, "Let Miss Alderman pour you a cup of coffee. It's excellent, I can assure you."

"Thank you, I could use one," said the industrialist, flinging himself in a rollachair that creaked ominously under his by no means inconsiderable weight. "I didn't get much sleep last night."

"I don't imagine you did," said Hamilton, shaking his head faintly at Nancy, who was giving him a shall-I-put-something-in-it? look. "You must have been pretty busy."

"All in the night's work," said Forsythe, yawning and extending his legs. His voice, like the rest of him, was big and deep. Charlie Forsythe looked like a gigantic, old-fashioned steel puddler who had come up in the world and was not quite adjusted to its social niceties—a bull in a china shop instead of the expensively-reared son of vast inherited wealth that he actually was. He was a throwback to the industrial-pirate era of the late nineteenth century—human, tough, limited, determined, likeable, and always dangerous.

He was, in fact, that most dangerous variety of anarchist—the sort that believes in absolute freedom for himself and stringent regulation for others. He was a dinosaur, a three-decker man of war. He was obsolete but he didn't know it. All of which, with his strength of personality and immense resources, made him doubly dangerous.

The cup of coffee Miss Alderman handed him looked like a child's piece of doll-house china in his immense hairy hand. He drained it at a draught, nodded his thanks, and said, "Well, where's the boy?"

"In there," said Hamilton, nodding toward the bedroom door. "He's sleeping it off."

"I've got an order here," said Forsythe patting his breast pocket. "I've also got operatives outside. We're picking up Ryan under the Security Act of nineteen fifty-six."

"You *have* been busy," said Hamilton, really worried. "But that Act has been superseded by a whole flock of subsequent legislation."

Forsythe grinned lazily, like a satisfied sabre-tooth tiger. He said, "Maybe—but it's still on the books. And by the time the courts get through arguing out the pros and cons of it we'll have all the juice out of the boy." He glanced at Hamilton, and added significantly, "All of this is on the level, isn't it? I'd hate to think I'd wasted the entire night for nothing."

Hamilton longed to lie, but knew it would gain him nothing. They'd simply pull Ryan in anyway and find out about his invention for themselves. He said, "It's on the level, Charley. But the whole thing

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is so new—so untried. It may take years, even decades."

Forsythe lit a cigar—a cigarette would have looked like a lady-cracker stuck in that enormous face. He said, "That may be so. But we can't afford to risk it. The Wrights invented the airplane at the turn of the century, and ten years later they were using it to bomb targets in the Second Balkan War."

That, thought Hamilton unhappily, was one of the things that made Forsythe dangerous. Underneath the bullyboy exterior lurked a first-class brain and a vast storehouse of knowledge in unexpected fields. It was, he decided, time to take steps.

"Charley," he said, "I think you know what I am empowered to do if you try this with Ryan. It is clearly stated in the SPR charter that infringement by a national government, or any subject or citizen of such a government, upon the rights of either SPR, or any member thereof, permits us to apply sanctions, either limited or total, according to our judgment. That's a UN General Assembly provision."

Forsythe looked sleepily amused. "Quite the lawyer, aren't you, Park? Too bad you aren't as good an American."

With difficulty Hamilton restrained the sudden surge of anger within him. He said, "Not today, Charley. But if you pull this kidnapping merely to save your own bank account SPR *will* take action —and we'll have no trouble getting UN backing."

"Of course you won't," said Forsythe, smiling. "But we can't afford the risk of matter-transmission at this point. We're willing to fly by the seat of our pants. The UN can't afford to have you people withdraw your patents from us and put America out of business." He blew a perfect smoke ring.

Miss Alderman emerged from the bedroom. "He's still out like a light," she said.

"We have an ambulance downstairs," said Forsythe quietly. "We were going to use it anyway."

Hamilton said, "Naturally, we wouldn't put America out of business. But we could withdraw your rights to all SPR patents employed in your international carriers. That would hurt *you*. It would force American exporters to use foreign carriers. But it wouldn't put America or the world out of business."

It was the old, hateful tug of war, the civilized man against the jungle barbarian in thought and deed. Not for the first time, Hamilton felt a sense of shame at his country's forbearance. As, he supposed, other internationalists must occasionally feel toward their own.

Forsythe said, "I hardly have to remind you, Park, that there is strong and growing resentment in certain influential circles against your SPR as a world monopoly that gobbles up all of our finest scientific brains and forces us to pay for their use."

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"If you'd paid them well enough to begin with, SPR would never have been formed," said Hamilton.

"Perhaps." Forsythe shrugged. "But that's water under the bridge. We shan't repeat the mistake, I promise you."

"You won't get the chance," warned Hamilton.

They were eyeing each other warily when the doorbell chimed again. Miss Alderman hastened to answer it. Ian Harris stood framed in the entranceway, backed by four white-and-blue-uniformed UN police officers. A pair of plainclothesmen, obviously Forsythe's operatives, hovered at a discreet distance behind them.

Harris, looking every inch the Britisher, waited until Miss Alderman had closed the door. Then he said, "Mr. Forsythe, am I right in my interpretation of what Miss Alderman recently informed me via UN communicator? Did you enter this apartment, accompanied by an armed escort, for the sole purpose of removing without his consent an SPR employee to an unknown destination?"

Forsythe shrugged his mammoth shoulders. "Interpret it as you choose. I came here empowered by the President of the United States, operating under law—the Security Act of nineteen fifty-six—to ensure that a citizen of my country does not employ his specialized knowledge to its jeopardy."

Harris said, drily, "For your information, Forsythe, and that of your government, all SPR property and persons fall under UN jurisdiction according to General Assembly agreement—an agreement ratified by all member nations. That naturally includes their living quarters. Since Miss Alderman is an SPR official her apartment is therefore inviolable by any national police force—except in case of a felony."

Hamilton stepped in. He said, "Gentlemen, we seem to have reached an impasse. May I therefore suggest a way out?"

III

HAMILTON left Forsythe and Ian Harris sitting on opposite sides of the fore-cabin of the SPR helirocket which was taking them swiftly southward to Antarctica. In the rear cabin were Miss Alderman and an unhappily reawakened Sven Ryan.

Hamilton nodded to his assistant and said, "Nancy, you'd better go forward and keep those two tigers from tearing each other limb from limb. I want to talk to Ryan alone. It's of great importance."

Miss Alderman slipped silently from the rear cabin and Hamilton sat down in the seat she had left vacant and studied the inventor in tight-lipped concern. Despite the fact that he had spent two years under the skin-tanning Antarctic sun and snow-glare, Sven Ryan's face was white. Quite obviously he was the sort of milk-skinned red-

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head who does not react to exposure by turning red or brown.

At the moment, his face was a near-pistachio green—a delicate pastel shade that contrasted vividly with the bright red of his hair and eyeballs. He sat despondently on his cot, with his chin in his hands, flanked by an oxygen inhalator and a half-empty bottle of anti-fatigue tablets.

He eyed his chief with resignation. "What are you going to do to me, Park?" he said. "Boot me out of the SPR?"

"For heaven's sake, why?" Hamilton asked, surprised.

"For blowing a couple of million bucks," was the solemn reply.

Hamilton had expected to find Ryan in the throes of physical reaction to his bender, but he had not expected such abject mental misery. He said, soothingly, "Sven, you know as well as I do that SPR funds are primarily for the use of its scientists—for their research and experimentation. The only thing that puzzles me is why you went gallivanting off and spilled your large flannel mouth all over New York last night."

Hamilton was prepared for every answer but the one he got. Incredibly, the inventor lifted his bleary eyes to the other's face and said, "Why shouldn't I drown my sorrows after blowing all that money and work on a miserable failure? And if I chose to talk about it, that's my business."

Hamilton felt as if the helirocket had hit an old-fashioned air pocket. The very breath seemed to go out of him. He said, "But according to the reports, your transmitter was a success. It worked."

Sven Ryan made a gesture of disgust. "Sure it worked," he said, "over one kilometer with a few kilos of dead weight. But you know what I was working for. My whole aim has been to invent some method of transport that will make interplanetary travel economically feasible. But what good is a transporter that cannot send organic life?"

He paused to take a whiff of oxygen and his looks and spirits almost visibly improved. "I must have been out of my mind, Park. I ran a dozen extra tests with white mice." He shook his head wretchedly. "What came out in the receiver was sickening. I felt like a sadist."

"So you took off and got drunk," said Hamilton. "You wanted to drown your sorrows."

Here, he thought, was a perfect example of the creative, scientific mind—a mind so wrapped up in fulfillment of a dream, in the attainment of a single end, that everything else remained in fuzzy focus. Here was that persistent anomaly, the completely dedicated man who would never cease to be a problem to the more scatter-gunned mass of humanity. It was a problem that ranged all the way from the absent-minded professor to the discoverer of new theories and machines that

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were constantly threatening to disrupt the balances by which other men lived.

"Seven years!" said Ryan gloomily. "Seven years and almost three million SPR dollars—and it's a tragic bust. Do you wonder I blew my top, Park?" He paused again and for an instant his eyes lighted up. "Chief, do you know who I ran into last night? I'm not going to tell you where, but it was—"

"It was Ian Harris of the UN, and you stumbled over him at Molly Sadler's house of joy," said Hamilton.

"How'd you know?" Ryan asked. Then, before his chief could answer, "Lord, Park, it was almost worth it. But I was in no mood to trade shop talk with Ian Harris then. So I grabbed me an armful of girls and took off. The next thing I remember, Nancy—your girl Friday—was hauling me away from them. And the next thing I remember after that is waking up here with the same face before me. Park, is part of her job tormenting poor scientists out for a little ill-deserved fun?"

Hamilton chuckled. Then he said, "Didn't she tell you anything, Sven?"

"She tried to," was the reply, "but I shut her up. As it was my ears were ringing in three different keys. Why do you ask?"

"Brace yourself, boy," said Hamilton, deciding it was time to discuss some home truths with a youth who was showing every sign of rapid recovery. "We're on our way to Antarctica. Did you know that?"

"That I got," said Ryan. "Are you planning to have me flayed alive or merely drawn and quartered?"

"Hardly," Hamilton assured him. "Though there are a couple of chaps up in the front cabin who might not be averse to such a plan. One of them is Charles Forsythe, the American Secretary for Science and Industry. The other is your old friend Ian Harris."

Ryan sat bolt upright on his cot, his clearing eyes wide with surprise. "Good God!" he exclaimed. "How come they're in on this? Are they planning to participate in my court-martial? I'm sorry, Park, if I've made things tough for you. But I don't quite see what I did to—"

"All you did," Hamilton interrupted, "was to invent the first successful instantaneous matter-transmitter in history. In your preoccupation with discovering a way to send men to the stars it evidently didn't occur to you that your little gadget, right here on Earth, can make every other means of transport from a mountain burro to the latest A-rocket obsolete overnight. And then you had to get drunk and spill it all over New York! Charlie Forsythe tried to put you under security lock and key for the United States."

Hamilton went on to explain exactly what had happened. How Nancy Alderman had plucked him to precarious safety, how Forsythe

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had attempted protective custody, how Harris had foiled Forsythe, and finally how Hamilton himself, after a prolonged and fruitless argument, had stepped in with a compromise suggestion.

"You mean you want me to run off a test for these characters?" Ryan inquired with amazing perspicacity.

"Exactly," said Hamilton. "You can, can't you?"

"Sure," was the prompt reply. "But it won't prove anything. The ground-level projection range is only a couple of kilometers. Even with towers, it won't transmit far enough to amount to anything. Who wants to haul heavy freight up to the top of a hundred-meter tower to move it a few more kilometers? Park, it just doesn't make sense."

"How far did the first airplane fly?" Hamilton asked the inventor. "A hundred and thirty-seven feet, wasn't it?"

"Hmmph!" Ryan took another whiff of oxygen. "I hadn't thought of the Earth-transport angle. But the bugs in this creation of mine are going to be a hell of a lot harder to work out. Earth-transport —why, it's like using a diecaster to crack a nut." Then, with a look of alarm, "Chief, you aren't giving up on the space-travel dream, are you?"

Hamilton shook his head. "You know better than that," he said. "In fact—" He let it hang, adding quickly, "But forget about your invention being a flop. It's potentially the most important single device any SPR man has ever come up with. I'm sorry we had to cut off your spree in mid-flight, but we couldn't afford an international panic just now."

A brief, boyish smile lent charm to the inventor's almost ugly face. He said wistfully, "I guess it would kick over a lot of applecarts at that. Hey, Park, where are you going?"

"You may not have noticed," said Hamilton drily, "but we're coming in to land. Don't you want to come forward and join the others? After all, you are the lion of this occasion."

Ryan hesitated, then shook his head. "I might embarrass Harris," he said, and winced at the accidental rhyme.

"Impossible," said Hamilton, rising. Then, recalling the Englishman's blush in his office only that morning, "Well, have it your own way. Just remember you're a hero, son."

"I'll try, Father Hamilton," said Ryan, patting his diaphragm and belching vigorously. "Sometimes I don't know what's worse—the hangover or its cure."

"You're cured," said Hamilton from the doorway. "See you at the base. Run these tests off and you'll get all the liberty and girls you want—liquor, too."

"Don't make me ill again," said Ryan. "I've had it for another five years. I'm even looking forward to

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seeing the girls at the base again. Thanks, Park—for everything."

An hour later, they were seated at a luncheon table in the CANT-SPR's private dining room, where Jack Witherspoon and his aides had whipped together a remarkable short-notice meal of foods raised or grown on the SPR Breeding and Agricultural Station.

There was a delicious plankton-and-shark-fin soup, followed by filets of musk-oxen that had been so treated by SPR husbandry and food experts that it rivaled the finest Argentine beef. These were accompanied by an astonishing array of locally-grown fruits and vegetables, some out of doors, some under artificial lights, and all of them hydroponically.

When dessert was served Witherspoon—a lean, nut-brown man with a high, near-bald forehead—remarked, "One thing we never have to worry about here is the sherbet. We always have plenty of ice."

The sally brought a chuckle, but it was of short duration. Forsythe and Ian Harris were still locked in their marathon argument as to the rights of the individual nation, and the individual citizen balanced against the stern edicts of a world control.

"You can't go against human nature," Forsythe said for the fifteenth time. "People are people, and they'll always want to take care of their own before they share with others."

"*Some* people, Forsythe," said Harris drily. "Fortunately or otherwise, there are a number of us who consider loyalty to self and species above loyalty to any institution or set of institutions, however traditional."

"I suppose," said Forsythe in his booming voice, "that the UN is not an institution—and you are not loyal to it?"

"A specious argument, I fear," replied Harris, stroking his neat black mustache. "I'll grant you that institutions are necessary, man being what he is. But it is therefore necessary for us to create and serve institutions that grow constantly larger in scope and embrace more and more people in their pattern of expansion. Should we not instead draw a line and say, 'Here I stop—I go no further.' "

"What will happen when we colonize the planets?" Sven Ryan asked.

Harris regarded the inventor with mild astonishment, while Forsythe looked actually baleful. The American cabinet member said, "I thought the space-dream was halted for the time being, after the last Moon-mission failed. How much did that one cost you people? Forty-one billions, wasn't it?"

"And the lives of seventeen men and women when the appropriations bill was cut—thanks largely to American influence in the UN," retorted the inventor hotly.

"If they'd come back as ordered, no one would have died," said

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Forsythe angrily. "What was the sense of maintaining a Moon station when all they could do was observe conditions there—at the staggering cost of fifteen billion dollars a year?"

"I opposed the appropriations cut, Mr. Ryan," Ian Harris reminded him. "However, expenses were running a bit hog-wild."

"Do you think of nothing but dollars?" Ryan asked pugnaciously. His hangover safely buried, he had acquired a new belligerence.

Hamilton broke the embarrassed silence that followed. Laying his napkin on the table, he rose and asked, "Don't you think we'd better be getting on with the test?"

Actually, he was on the inventor's side of the argument, but he dared not risk alienating the others. Leaving the dining room, they were taken underground, where they donned temperature-proof aluminum coveralls. Then they rode a swift, monorail subway to the proving ground. Hamilton wished his chest would stop itching. It always began the moment he found himself unable to scratch it.

Miss Alderman caught his arm for an instant as they left the monorail at the end of their journey. "What have you got in mind, Chief?" she asked him in a cautious whisper.

"Wait and see," was his whispered reply. "We've still got an ace or two up our sleeves."

"I hope so," she said earnestly. "If Mr. Forsythe gets frightened enough, I'm afraid he'll ask the Americans to drop a bomb on the whole base."

"We can stop a bomb," Hamilton told her quietly. "We've got to stop any effort to put clamps on SPR through UN channels. I'm not even sure how Ian would stand on such a move if your boyfriend's invention looks too good. But that's my job. You concentrate on keeping Ryan in hand. You didn't do too well at the lunch table."

"He's not my boyfriend!" was Miss Alderman's hot retort—a trifle too heated, Hamilton thought.

He replied with his most irritating chuckle.

IV

As THE tests were set up, Hamilton, Sven Ryan and Ian Harris remained at the near transmitter-post, while Forsythe and Miss Alderman journeyed by jet-sled across a kilometer of concrete to the far terminus, with Jack Witherspoon doing the honors as operator at the terminus post. The transmitter, looking somewhat like an old-fashioned circular heater, or primitive radar receptor, was enclosed in a heated dome-hut. With the complex machinery that surrounded it, it rose more than two meters high.

Ian Harris, regarding it with a dubious gleam in his eye, remarked, "It looks rather like an upended warming pan, doesn't it?"

Hamilton ignored the remark. "As I get it, Sven, the principle

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involved is that of atomic transmutation—right?" he asked, prowling about the machine as the inventor set about preparing it for the test with quiet efficiency.

"That's the basic idea," Ryan replied. "Actually, it breaks down the cargo into its atomic components, and transmits it over the beam to the terminus, where it is reassembled. The whole process of break-down, like the reassembly, must take place in one-thousandth of a second—or we'd come up with apple tapioca or something. You should see some of the messes we've had. And"—he added with a glance at Hamilton, "I don't mean the mice."

"Int'resting," said Ian Harris, stroking his mustache. "Any chance of an explosion if the timing's off?"

Ryan shook his copper head. "Not a chance," he replied firmly. "There's nothing to trigger a critical mass—and besides, there's no critical mass to trigger. If there were"— He paused significantly. "If there were we'd have been blown to bits, along with a large chunk of Antarctica, months ago. Some of our timing was so far off it was pitiful."

Hamilton said, "What about while your beam is operating. Any time limit on that?"

"None that we know of," was the reply. "Once she's in beam transmission, she's static. It's the breakdown and reassembly stages where every millisecond counts."

He flipped a switch, and a large visiscreen showed Jack Witherspoon preparing a duplicate of the transmitter, with Miss Alderman and hulking Charley Forsythe hovering in the background.

"Ready, Jack?" the inventor asked.

"In a minute," was the reply. "What are you sending us?"

Sven looked at Ian Harris. "Willing to risk your watch?" he asked. "Park will replace it if anything goes wrong."

"You can send a watch without hurting it?" the UN liaison man asked.

"Well, we're going to try," said Sven, his features impassive.

After a moment of reluctance, the Englishman pulled a slim platinum timepiece from his pocket. "The chain, too?" he asked.

"Sure—why not? Thanks." The inventor took the objects and placed them in an adjustable holder in the center of the transmitter. "You spoiled my time last night, Mr. Harris," he said. "Why shouldn't I spoil yours today?"

"*Hah!* Very good," said Harris, looking faintly uncomfortable.

In the screen, Witherspoon said, "Ready here, Sven."

"Coming at you," said the redheaded inventor. He pushed a button. Witherspoon unlocked the receiver on the screen and held the Englishman's watch close to it.

"Jove! It's still ticking!" said Harris, looking relieved. Moments later, it had been sent back and he

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was holding it in his hand, an expression of utter incredulity on his habitually impassive face. "Impossible!" he exclaimed faintly.

"But true," said Sven with a trace of mockery. Hamilton frowned at him and shook his head.

After a half dozen other tests, which included transmission and re-transmission of a kilo of butter, a lump of crude iron, a book, a jet-sled, a handkerchief and a bunch of station-grown grapes, the two parties reassembled and rode the monorail back to the main base, where Witherspoon had them served fine synthetic brandy. Hamilton noted that Ryan took a soft drink instead.

There had been little talk during the journey. In Witherspoon's quarters, Hamilton noticed an obviously shaken Charley Forsythe and a white-faced Ian Harris gathered in a corner, where they seemed to be reaching some sort of whispered agreement.

Miss Alderman, regarding them anxiously, nudged her chief's elbow and asked, "Don't you think we ought to break that up before it goes too far? I'm not scared of either of them. But the thought of them together gives me chills."

Hamilton shook his head. "Let's hear what they have to say," he replied, *sotto voce*. "I'd like to get this whole business thrashed out and settled before we get back to New York. Once they're on their own again, I'm afraid to imagine what they'll do."

He chatted with Sven Ryan and Witherspoon, congratulating them on their achievement. But he kept a weather eye cocked on the conference in the corner. When Forsythe cleared his throat like some giant bullfrog, and stepped forward, he was prepared for anything.

"First," said the aggressive financier in his great roar of a voice, "I want to congratulate you, Ryan, and all of you in SPR, for what you have shown us this afternoon. If I hadn't seen it with my own eyes, I'd never have believed it."

He paused for effect, then went on with, "However, I am sure you are all aware of the momentous consequences of this latest and greatest of human accomplishments. Before I go on, I want to say that Mr. Harris, as the UN representative on the spot, is in full agreement with me.

"As things stand today, if so much as a whisper leaks out that you have accomplished instantaneous matter-transmission, we'll be facing a financial breakdown that will make the Great Depression of fifty years ago look like a boom. Since we have no guarantee that the secret can or will be kept—no offense, gentlemen and Miss Alderman—both Mr. Harris and I feel we are going to have to put the entire SPR Antarctica Base under security wraps.

"Mind you, this is only a temporary fiat, as yet unbacked by either UN or United States mandate. But, in view of the appalling potential

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of your discovery, both Mr. Harris and I feel that no other steps will suffice."

Hamilton *shushed* an irate Sven Ryan, who looked ready to do battle with his fists. He stepped forward, wishing fugitively that he didn't have to look up to the financier. Turning to Harris, he said, "Ian, do you really want to clamp down on SPR?"

The Englishman looked miserable—but helpless. He said, "I detest the step and you know it. But what else is there to do, old man?"

Hamilton sighed. "Instead of suppressing knowledge—a step that has never worked for long in all history—why don't you prepare the world to accept this new miracle?"

Forsythe boomed, "It's too big a risk, Park. They'll never adjust to the idea without a bad crash. This is going to take *years* of preparation. It's like asking Australian bushmen to drive helicars in New York overhead traffic."

"Perhaps it's not as big a jump as you fear," said Hamilton quietly. "Charley, you've been looking for a loophole to crack down on SPR—pardon the scrambled metaphor—all your life. You're jumping at the chance to suppress something you can't control. Ian, you're not really frightened—you're being lazy. You are afraid of the work that has to be done."

Stung, the Englishman said, "Possibly, Park. But consider the full implications of the ability to transport an endless flood of material across any ocean you wish—instantaneously. Why should any shipper on Earth even consider our present modes of transport?"

"Because," said Hamilton, with a half-wink at an obviously bursting Sven Ryan, "the present modes of transport are the only means of getting their goods where they want them to go."

"What are you talking about?" Forsythe boomed.

"But with our own eyes, we saw—" began Harris.

Hamilton raised his hand. "You witnessed matter transmission, never fear," he told them. Then he went on to detail what the inventor had told him in the helirocket, adding a detail or two he knew himself. "So you see," he concluded, "to transmit matter over any distance would mean the building of immense towers and loading platforms. The transmitter cannot send through the curve of the Earth. And it cannot be bounced off the Heavyside Layer."

Forsythe and Harris exchanged puzzled glances. It was the UN official who said, "Then you mean the device is impractical? If it is, what are we so excited about?"

"Precisely what I was wondering," said Hamilton. "Good artificial jewels have been made for more than a century. But real gems have not lost an iota of their value." He paused to sip his brandy, added, "So you gentlemen have let the mere words *matter-transmission* terrify you."

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"If the words alarmed *us*," said Harris, "consider their effect on humanity at large."

"Probably much less than you suppose," said Hamilton. "Remember, humanity at large has much less immediately at stake in the various forms of transportation than either of you."

Forsythe seemed to have lost interest. "You're right, Park, much as I hate to admit it. We're up against nothing a little well-guided public relations campaign won't handle. And you — SPR — have come up with another impractical invention."

"Impractical?" said Hamilton, looking one by one at the others in the room. "I wouldn't say so. Sven Ryan, you set out to develop a means of making space-flight economically feasible. When your transmitter proved unable to send living creatures intact, you thought you had failed."

"What have you got in mind, Park?" the inventor asked.

"Just this," said Hamilton. "What has made any successful establishment of posts on the Moon or any of the planets impossible? It is not the transportation of *men*. It is the transportation of material both ways to maintain them and make their operation profitable — scientifically as well as economically. Sven, there's no Earth curvature between here and the near side of the Moon. Once we set up a transfer-terminus on the near side, the supply problem would be licked."

Ryan leaped on Hamilton, and gave him a bear-hug. "Chief!" he almost shouted. "You've done it! You've got the answer!"

Half-laughing, Hamilton got clear of the inventor and said, "I may have an answer, but *you* did it." He turned toward Harris and Forsythe, adding, "Well, what do you gentlemen think now of our impractical gadget?"

Harris could only nod. From his relieved expression, from the glint of excitement in his eyes, there was no question where his true sympathies lay. Charley Forsythe stepped forward again, grabbed Ryan and said, "By God, when you get it worked out, I want to go up there."

"You're too big—and too fat!" said the inventor.

"Gentlemen," said Hamilton, moving in again, "a toast to the transmitter, and to its inventor—and to the Moon and all the moons and planets beyond!"

"Passage to anywhere," Miss Alderman murmured as she lifted her glass.

Later, riding back to New York with her in the helirocket, Hamilton felt limp, washed-out, distinctly sorry for himself "Why do I have to get back so soon?" he inquired, a trifle peevishly. "Charley and Ian are having all the fun back there in Antarctica, celebrating."

"Duty calls, Chief," she said with an indulgent smile.

He ignored her. "And all I get is a hug from Sven Ryan. For five

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bucks, I'd pay Molly Sadler a visit and meet some of those stunners of hers in the flesh."

"Not for five dollars, you wouldn't," said Miss Alderman with a half-smile. "Besides, you're not the type."

"Dammit, do you have to remind me now?" he said. He settled lower in his seat and wished he had a hat to pull over his eyes. He wished Nancy Alderman weren't so damnably puritanic. He wished . . .

Moments later, Mrs. Nancy Hamilton leaned across him and made sure his jacket would not get rumpled while he slept.

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the vapor horn

by . . . Ethel G. Lewis

Rizia could only wait in terror while Jonie was made ready for the coming of Eternity. Would he be healed—or lost to her forever?

THE WEARY, anxious eyes of Rizia Dom saw nothing but the two inch wall button, a lighter blue than the wall into which it was set. For two hours she had uncomprehendingly watched while Davi, her husband, worked at feverish pitch. The final step in the Vapor Horn apparatus, this button represented the difference between life and death for their six year old son Jonie.

In the night, behind them now, she and Davi had taken turns cradling the frail body wracked by fierce coughing seizures. Jonie was the victim of a rare bronchial ailment for which no medicine had been devised, and often in the past months it had seemed to Rizia that Jonie could not continue to live.

When, at last, Jonie was mercifully able to slip into an exhausted sleep, Davi had drawn her from the boy's room. Gone was the anguished father, and from his fatigue-narrowed eyes the stern scientist looked at her.

"I shall set up the HORN," he said. He seemed to forcibly gather the reluctant words from the back of his throat in order to push them from his pale, sad lips. "It is Jonie's

There are aspects of Time and Eternity which must, of necessity, place the reader of a story such as this in constant double jeopardy. So if you want to be safe and comfortable you may prefer not *to blow upon* THE VAPOR HORN. *But if you do you'll find that Ethel Lewis knows exactly how to overcome the fearfulness of the Unborn with the kind of fantasy entertainment that calls for encore after encore. And what is safety when dark wonder beckons?*

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only chance. Another such night and we shall lose him."

Glancing across the room to make certain the draperies were tightly drawn, he set to work at once without a lost movement. He drew THE CARTON from the hall enclosure and began deftly to assemble the parts it contained. Rizia had always thought of the container as THE CARTON, its connotations filling her with an uneasiness founded not in knowledge but in fruitless surmise.

In the past months Davi had referred to his secret experiment but once. Holding her very close to him, he had murmured, "Very soon, the HORN may be completed. I have reached the final step in its structure. And my heart is not glad, Rizia."

She had never known why Davi's drive as a scientist, to build the HORN, was coupled with painful reluctance to see the job done. Nor could she force herself to ask questions. This morning, with dawn beginning to stretch out rosy fingers, she felt only a great gratitude because the HORN stood on a shelf in Jonie's room, because the disc was here, ready for her touch, in mute testimony to Davi's skill. It was Davi's skill which would hold their Jonie to life.

As Davi rose from his stooping position, the empty container now out of sight once more, Rizia stood up to go to him. She saw his hands clench at his sides in one brief expression of inner qualms. And in the first lifting of the night darkness, she looked at this slender man with tenderness. He was gray-faced with fatigue.

"Davi," she whispered.

He caught her shoulders with urgency. "What I have done is dangerous," he said. "You must follow my instructions to the letter!"

"Of course, Davi," she said.

He released her, but he remained close enough so that his whispering voice would come clear to her trembling attentiveness.

"I have done for Jonie," he began, "what I have avoided doing for the Authorities. A year ago, you will remember, I attended the special convening of the scientists for study in the realm of INTERDIMENSIONAL PENETRATION."

Voiceless, she nodded.

"Since that time, I have been summoned again and again to appear before the Authorities. They are eager to penetrate," his voice thickened, "Eternity."

"Eternity," she echoed and clasped her hands in terror.

"I have been able to plead incompletion of my materials. I have put them off. They have used bribes. Extra rations, time off from the Station to journey to the Entertainment Sector for the yearly concert. Rizia —" He leaned toward her, an attitude of beseechment making him seem thinner and more fragile than ever. "Rizia, you must understand that as a human being I am revolted by their demands. I cannot countenance their penetration of Eternity. The scientist in me is driven to com-

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plete a momentous undertaking, but he too is revolted. Frightened, perhaps. Knowledge can bring fear."

He drew a long breath and half turned from her. "For Jonie I have done the task. Jonie will, in the atmosphere evoked by the HORN at the peak of his suffering, be able to draw breath. To live." Now his face was lined with harassment. "But in that same atmosphere, it is possible for the materialization of those who dwell in Eternity."

Drums beat in her temples and she felt her eyes distend. "I cannot," she whispered. "Oh, Davi, I cannot comprehend."

Patience overlaid his thirty-five years with an added ten, so that he seemed to her in that moment an old man.

"I shall try to explain in simple language. You might term what I have done something of a filtering process. I have worked with the oxygen atom, specifically with the positive elements of the nucleus. That is the vital key. By freeing the oxygen atom of all negative elements such as is contained in electrons, I was able to bring about the rarefied air Jonie must have.

"I—ah, Rizia, your eyes grow cloudy. You are weary and this is all far beyond your comprehension. And that is best. Let it suffice that I have accomplished my task. Let it suffice that our Jonie shall be able to draw life into his lungs during his crisis."

Desperately she tried to meet him on common ground. "I want to know," she said urgently. "I must not be entirely ignorant. I begin to accept facts. Your machine breaks down and then reassembles in another form the parts of the oxygen you need."

She was rewarded by the dart of light in his tired, brown eyes.

"Yes," he nodded. "The HORN reforms the combinations of the positive elements, thinning the air which is too heavy for Jonie's tortured lungs."

And now they were both very still, their eyes clinging.

"But in this thinner air," she said in the manner of one mesmerized, "those who dwell in Eternity may be evoked."

One of his hands clamped down on her upper arm. "My hope is that thirty minutes will not be long enough for a materialization," he said.

"I may see—the creature?" She was whirling in a dark circle of growing terror.

"Creature?" A faint smile curved Davi's dry lips. "These are from Eternity, Rizia. THE UNBORN. THE DEAD. I suspect that ONE of THE UNBORN would be beautiful, that he would be of such beauty that it might blind a mortal." Davi seemed to be drawing himself back from a faraway land to which he had travelled alone. He drew a hand over his eyes.

"There's little time," he said suddenly. "I must report to the forty-eight hour shift. This means I shall not return for the night, Rizia, as

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you know. All night you will be alone with Jonie. I rely on you to listen to my instructions with utmost care. And this morning I must be prompt. No one must suspect what I have done."

No one must know, she said over and over in her mind. As no one must know how ill dear Jonie had been. Children ill as Jonie were entered in THE BOOK under Deficit. One day a white gyrocar drew up before a home and a white-robed figure descended with outstretched arms. No allowances were made for grief or plea. The child was placed into the outstretched arms. The gyrocar lifted into the air. The child was never seen again.

"I promise," she said, summoning strength. "I shall do exactly what you instruct me to do. No one shall know."

They would save Jonie, she thought desperately. She and Davi between them would guard their child and keep him safe.

"Tell me," she urged.

"If Jonie's seizure begins lightly, *wait,*" Davi said slowly. "If the seizures continue, and gather fury, you must press the button and begin to count off thirty minutes. You are to give all of your attention to the counting, for the HORN must run no longer than that. Do you understand?"

"I understand," she said. I understand, she thought, that you, Davi, are among the martyrs of the year 2006. Now, among the items of my total comprehension, you stand out as a man of genius, suffering torment because of that genius, and helpless against it.

"Rizia, one last thing. I have waited with the last because of its importance among these things of which we spoke. The average human being could not survive in the aura created by the HORN. You are not to go into Jonie's room. *You are not to go into Jonie's room until you have pressed the button to shut off the HORN after thirty minutes.* Indeed you are not to leave this room. Some of the odor will permeate the house but the aura itself will not be insinuated beyond Jonie's room. Remember. Do not step over the threshhold into the connecting hall. The hall will not be safe for you until after you have pressed the button for shut-off."

His voice stopped abruptly.

"Now, I must go."

"But you too are so weary," she cried. "Davi, take a ration, possibly a bath."

"No." His voice was a faint sigh. He picked up one of her hands and gently brought it to his lips. It was months since they had loved, and yet there had been deep feeling between them at their union. The feeling, she knew, lay there now waiting for their attention in a tense, cruel, difficult life from which they could not escape.

"And if Jonie calls out," she asked, torn twofold.

"You are not to go to him." Davi's face took on the sternness of the scientist. The father in him, the

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husband, were displaced and he stood before her a slender man tormented by his own capabilities. "I wish to find you both here," he went on, his voice a deliberate monotone. "I want to find Jonie alive and well. I want to find you here, Rizia—as I left you. So that I may find it possible to go on with my life."

"Davi, I promise. I promise!" Anguish tore at her throat.

"Good." Davi left the room.

She heard the sounds of his gyrocar, the lift of wings and then only the faint hum of a motor carrying him from her.

The day was uneventful. Although Jonie did not ask to leave his bed as a healthy child would have done, he was cheerful and appeared to be without discomfort. The night was Jonie's enemy. *It is the night,* Rizia cautioned herself, *which I must battle.* She performed her usual daily duties and had her own rations in company with Jonie at his bedside.

Some of the clutching fear left her, so that she prepared her child for the night without the weight of nameless threat. Her hands lingered on his tiny face, and then she smoothed the cool white sheets repeatedly so that no wrinkle would press against Jonie's tender skin. He was smiling when he told her goodnight . . .

In the blue-walled room, she sat to rest, intending to switch on the overhead panel which serviced women who had been unable to attend the weekly lecture on WOMEN'S PLACE IN OUR CIVILIZATION. Three absences a year were permitted and this week she had used up her second. She had experienced a strange reluctance of late to mingle with the other women all uniformly clad, all silent, all docile.

Had she dozed? She sat up and shivered as the sound of coughing came to her. Jonie! Fully awake now, she forced herself to remain where she was, fearfully alert to the rise of the child's seizures. Louder. More torn and prolonged. Anguish tore at her. How long has he been coughing? How long had she slept in exhaustion? Her body quickened with intent to run to Jonie, but Davi's admonition sprang to her mind: If the seizures begin lightly, *wait.* If they continue and gather fury, press the button.

Another furious paroxysm coming from the direction of Jonie's room catapulted her toward the small round button. Her fingers pounced and pressed, and her own breathing became a labored, wheezing noise in the room. Now, the time, she told herself, seeking calm, drawing on the intelligence of the individual to replace the mother. She fastened her eyes on her timepiece strapped to her wrist, as she sat down once more.

Carefully she guarded the minutes as they crept away. Ten minutes passed, and to her joyous, incredulous ears came the lessening sounds from Jonie's room. Slower beat her thudding heart, and exquisitely sweet was the sense of peace that

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came upon her. Each spasm was brief and devoid of the fury which had thrice rent her own breast with fire. Suddenly her impulse was to laugh. Almost she had forgotten what a joyous relief laughter could bring. She had a sense of soaring skyward, of spreading her arms in an ecstasy of flight . . . Jonie's coughing had ceased altogether.

Gradually she became aware of a sweet, strange odor that was not unpleasant. Peering into the hall, she saw nothing and then quickly she dropped her eyes to her time-piece. Twelve minutes remained. Uneasily she pondered. Since Jonie no longer coughed, was it perhaps wise to use the button control before the passage of thirty minutes. She half rose, but upon hearing a faint cough from Jonie's room, she chided herself for having been tempted to deviate from Davi's instructions.

As she sat in her chair, the scent of the Vapor brought with it a sense of euphoria, and sweet was the realization that Jonie was saved. Now she must give her full attention to her time-piece and count off the passing minutes. Davi had devised a miracle and she was its guardian. She had heard no alien sound as these thoughts occupied her, but quite suddenly a presence announced itself to her consciousness. Turning to look into the hall she saw a figure! At once astonishment and fear drove the blood in torrents from her heart.

She stood up, crying, "No!"

The figure came closer, and as he neared the doorway she shrank away, her hands pressed tightly against her lips lest she scream outright and inflict upon herself an even more unendurable burden of terror.

"Do not fear me," came a voice.

"Go away!" she whispered hoarsely.

He stood just beyond the threshhold and she saw that he was slender and clothed in shining raiment. She saw that his movements had grace and lightness, and forcing herself into scrutiny, that his eyes were golden and that he wore a cap of gleaming gold. Radiant slippers covered his feet, and upon his face there was a look of gentle calm. It was a handsome face with perfect features. A glow emanated from the skin.

"Who are you?" she whispered.

"I am Dom," he said. In his voice there sounded the ringing of bells.

"Dom!" she repeated. "But we are Dom. Davi Dom is my husband. There is little Jonie, our son."

"I know," Dom said. He extended one of his long, slender hands, gold-tipped, and the fingers curled in a gesture of grace. "You are Rizia."

"But you are a stranger. How can you know my name?"

His smile was wondrously sweet. "We visit the home of our Name. I am here because I am Dom."

Confused, but with each passing moment less fearful, Rizia said, "May I offer you refreshment?"

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"Thank you. I require none," he said.

"But from which family of Dom are you?" she asked. "Davi has a brother Jon who is stationed at the Wheat Farm. He has three very young sons. But there are no others. I have never been told of Doms in another community."

"Rizia," he said gently, repeating her name without emphasis, but giving it to her heightened awareness the sound of some precious thing. "I come from Eternity."

The cry of *Davi, help me,* began within her aching mind, for now she knew that the unthinkable had taken place! A materialization had taken place!

"Do not fear me, Rizia," he said, his face expressing concern.

"But you are an Unborn or are you a—" She faltered.

"I am not one of the Returned," he said; his voice ever more gentle. "I am an Unborn."

Oh, was he dangerous behind that handsome exterior, the voice of bells and movements of grace?

"You would not hurt Jonie!" she cried.

"I would not hurt Jonie," Dom said.

"Why have you come? Tell me why? Is it because of the VAPOR HORN that you could come?"

"Yes," he said, and now he raised both arms and held his hands out before him and she saw the gold-tipped fingers and she whirled in renewed terror.

"Davi has made my materialization possible," he went on. "There are no secrets from us, Rizia. Dwellers in Eternity exist perpetually and we are knowledgeable beyond the span of any human being's scope. We knew of the possibility of the proper aura for materialization but we are powerless to create such an aura. We have been watching. Waiting."

"But why?" she cried. "Why did you wish to come here? Go back now. Dom. Please, go now before—before—"

She could not go on. Her thoughts were no longer obedient to her will. What could she do? If she sprang to press the button now would they all be safe once more?

His voice came to her in the monotone rhythm of a lesson learned. "The Earth Species in its masochistic drive toward *improvement* have impaired the peace of Our Dimension. First, some time ago, it was the harnessing of lightning for the generation of electricity. We were able to absorb that shock, but your Machine Age followed quickly, dousing us with blasts both beneath the sea and high in the firmament.

"The surcharges from your perpetual radio and-television antenna caused chaos among us. And, of late, there has been the new, searing inroads upon us of fall-out from your atomic blasts. Our orbit is penetrated deeply, and now only the very strongest survive. The era of Nuclear Fission is our anathema."

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"But progress," she whispered desperately.

His eyes seemed to flame and his voice took on its bell tone once more. "An inverse term. We have been forced to view the soul in relation to the body in quite unorthodox perspective. For instance such Earth Forms as the one in which I appear have been constructed for our missions here."

"Missions—" She felt drained of all strength.

Sadness overlay his golden skin. "It has been advocated by our Council that we borrow from the human body. Housing, the process will be called. Earth-strength as found in sinew and bone, may possibly be our answer." His voice seemed to be no more than a sigh.

"Borrowing." She could only repeat the word woodenly. I must do something at once, she thought frenziedly, and could not move.

"Very soon," Dom said gently, shaking his handsome head, "there will be a dearth of Souls. A pity—for only Eternity can provide souls for the newborn." His voice was a gentle stir of bells and music such as she knew had been heard long ago, in another time and in another civilization. "As more of us disintegrate, the time grows shorter in which measures may be taken."

Time! His words brought realization of the passing of time to her. In a great panic she saw by her time-piece that three minutes remained of the thirty.

"Do not fear me," Dom said. "We seek immunity to our destruction in much the same way that mortals seek immunity from disease by being injected with a serum containing the plague germ which threatens them. We shall lose our identity as it exists today. Possibly the result will not be one of beauty. A Demi-Species, able to exist in either Dimension—"

He too was torn. Rizia saw that now. He was made unhappy by the whole scheme of 'borrowing.' He was good . . . he was very beautiful. How could he be an enemy? 'Of such beauty as might blind a mortal,' Davi had said.

She felt herself caught by a wave of longing to touch the contours of Dom's face. She wanted his closeness, and even as the thought came to her, she heard him speak her name.

"Rizia."

Looking fully at him she saw in his golden eyes the longing which he most surely saw in her own.

"You are more beautiful than the sunrise," she said.

"Rizia, come back with me," he pleaded.

"I promised Davi to be here," she said painfully. "We . . . Jonie and I, make life possible for Davi. The man and the scientist are in constant battle within him."

"I know," Dom said. He put out a hand and it seemed to her that the golden tips reached through a veil into the air of the blue room where she stood transfixed. "I must take back a Dom with me," he said gent-

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ly. "You carry a seed of Dom within you, although you were not born Dom."

A seed? Then it was so. She had thought it possible, had hoped and had not been certain, with many months of strangeness between her and Dom to wipe out the memory of a night when she had not been lonely.

"I cannot go!" she cried. How could she leave Dom now? And Jonie? Who would care for Jonie!

With a great effort she threw off the magic of Dom's beauty. Enthralled, she was becoming enslaved.

"Does it seem cruel to you, Rizia, to ask you this? To come back with me?"

She permitted herself one last look deep into his eyes and he became the ultimate need, the golden, sweet, glowing truth she had needed for so very long.

"I cannot," she said.

"Then I must take Jonie." His voice was sad.

"Not Jonie! I'm his mother. I shall not permit it!"

Dom shook his head gently. "Ah, Rizia, in Eternity there are no subdivisions. All are mothers and all are fathers. All are brothers and all are lovers. We have existed in soundless, soothing peace."

"But on earth we must have subdivisions," she cried. "Without it there would be confusion!"

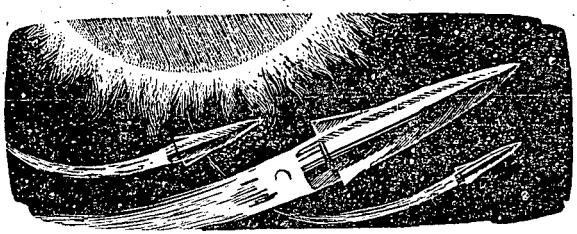
"And have you not confusion now?" Dom asked.

She had reached within a foot of the blue disc which her shaking hand must press. The huge balloon of terror distending the skin of her sweating body must wait and not explode before she pressed the disc. There! Her finger jammed down and pressed and with the action the little cries begin to issue from her mouth.

He was gone when she found strength enough to move toward the doorway. And with him had vanished the last scent of the Vapor.

"Jonie!" she cried and began to run in the direction of the boy's room.

In the dark of the room she saw nothing but she found her way to the bed. Her hands groped the length and breadth of the bed in futile hope. She knew beyond doubt, that she would find no little boy there, but only the sheet which she had carefully drawn smooth a short time ago.



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a woman's right

by . . . Robert Silverberg

When Science *really* comes of age Fear may be banished forever. But it will take some tall persuading.

"I'VE DISCOVERED that Diane is not the woman I married," John Bedlow said. "I want my money back."

There was no anger in his voice. It was simply forceful and determined. It was the voice of a man who was accustomed to ask for what he wanted—and to get it without discussion.

But the psychometrist had apparently decided to oppose him. He was a muscular, energetic-looking young man with a dusky synthotan. He lifted a quizzical brow and looked Bedlow straight in the eye.

"Your money back, Mr. Bedlow? I'm afraid that's impossible."

"Did you hear me?" Bedlow snapped—and he was really angry now.

"I heard you tell me that Diane Bedlow is not the woman you married. I'd like to know precisely what you meant by that, please."

Bedlow folded his hands together in front of him, and leaned forward with the air of a man about to explain proper social behavior to a stubborn child.

"Dr. Mauserton, I married my

When a writer comparatively new to science fiction enlists under the advance guard banner of psychiatry the outcome could be disappointing, even disastrous. But there is no uncertainty at all about the shining nature of Robert Silverberg's victory. Not only has he looked prophetically into the future. He has gone to the root of a major psychosis, and come up with a simply terrific story.

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wife because she had certain qualities I felt to be necessary and desirable in a wife. She was modest, quiet, and agreeable. She dressed conservatively and behaved with decorum."

"I'm well aware of that," said Dr. Mauserton. "I've studied the films most carefully."

"That's another thing that's bothered me," Bedlow said in irritation. "Those secret cameras. Why did you set them up, may I ask?"

"I thought I had explained that to your complete satisfaction when you came here to request us to perform a subconscious psychotomy on your wife. Those cameras represent part of our customary operating equipment. We had them installed so that we could secure adequate data on her before the treatment."

"All right. You've sidetracked me. Let's get back to my main point." Bedlow got up and paced around the bare little office. "You did a conspicuously poor job. I want my money back, and you'd better see I get it."

The psychometrist considered that for a moment. Then he said: "Do you know anything at all about psychometry, Mr. Bedlow?"

Bedlow shrugged. "Only what I've read in the popular journals," he said, trying—but without much success—to control his anger.

"In that case, you should be able to understand my explanation very easily. You have a mind that can assimilate facts quickly and use them to immediate, practical advantage."

"Look here," said Bedlow with a trace of gratification. "I'm not asking for a psychological analysis of my own reasoning powers. I'm asking for a recompense for breach of contract. You and I discussed my wife's difficulties, and you told me you'd operate on her in such a way as to clear up her maladjustment. You didn't say anything about changing her so completely that she's—"

"*Mister* Bedlow!" said the psychometrist sharply. "Apparently you're not fully aware of the nature of the agreement we entered into. But before we discuss that, I'd prefer to—"

"Let's discuss it right now," Bedlow interrupted. "I'm a busy man."

"So am I, Mr. Bedlow. Will you listen to what I have to say before you go off on flying tangents?" Without waiting for an answer, Dr. Mauserton punched a code number into a film file sorter on his desk. There was a subdued click, and a screen on the nearby wall came to life in glowing colors.

"I'm going to show you one of the most significant of the scenes upon which we based our diagnosis and treatment," Mauserton said. "Watch."

The screen lighted up and revealed a section of the Bedlow living room.

Bedlow, with a little shock of recognition, saw himself standing

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on one side of the room looking at his wife, who was seated on a plastifoam couch near the window.

She was a plain-looking woman —not ugly, just discouragingly plain. Her features were finely formed and her body was shaped the proper way, but she lacked something—an inner luster, a sort of intensity—that would have made her anything but plain. Her severely-tailored clothing and tight, swept-back hairdo did nothing to alleviate her mousiness.

"But I just *can't* go to that party, John," she was saying. "You know how I hate those things." Her voice did not whine. It was just low and depressingly matter-of-fact.

"I know, my dear," Bedlow said. "But I'm afraid it's absolutely necessary." He paused for a moment, his strong, mobile face mirroring the determination that smouldered just beneath the surface. "It's been eight months since we had our trial marriage terminated and got our orthomarriage decree. In all that time, we've gone to only two parties —no, three."

He looked grimly at her. "It's bad, Diane. My friends are all wondering why you never show up at the Executive Recreations. I'm an important man at Barr Spaceways, and I can't afford to let the higher echelons get any weird ideas about me into their heads. You simply will have to go, at least to *this particular affair.*"

She was silent for an agonizing moment. Then she nodded slowly. "All right, John," she said in a soft, almost despondent voice. "If you want me to."

Bedlow smiled. "Of course I want you to, darling. And don't get the notion that it's just myself I'm thinking about. That isn't it at all. I want you to learn to come out of your shell a little—to really enjoy life." His smile became almost conspiratorial as he glanced at the hidden camera that the psychometricians had installed.

Diane Bedlow tried to match her husband's smile. But she failed by a considerable length, achieving only a kind of half-grin, half-smirk that was not at all cheerful. "I know, darling. And I'm sorry I'm such a poor wife."

Bedlow sat down on the couch beside her. "Diane, I never said you were a bad wife. You're not. You're exactly what I want in a wife." He put his arm around her, sensing suddenly how weak and helpless she was.

"But it's not true," she said, sobbing. "I'm *not* exactly what you wanted, or anything like it. I never want to go to parties, I never dress the right way, I—"

He interrupted her catalogue of her deficiencies before she was well under way with it. "That's the only thing I wish you'd work on, darling," he said, knowing that in a few days the psychosurgeons of the Institute of Applied Psychosurgery would be working on it for her.

"It's this—what do they call it? —something-phobia you have. This

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fear of crowds. Even so, it's not really serious. It doesn't bother you to go shopping or walk down the street, does it?"

"A little," she said. "But not very much, no. I guess I can take the party. I'm not *that* weak." She flashed him a smile.

"I know you're not," Bedlow said warmly. "Now come on. Let's get ready."

They got up and walked, hand in hand, toward the bedroom. The scene flickered suddenly as the living room camera cut out and the bedroom camera came on.

The bedroom, like the living room, was spacious. It could easily have been cut in two without crowding its occupants. Bedlow shrugged out of his jacket and said: "Get out my Exec formal, will you, sweetheart? And put all the ribbons on this time."

After a hesitant pause she said, "Don't you think that's a little showy, John? I mean—"

Bedlow turned and glared at her. "Diane, I've told you, time and time again, that it's a mark of distinction to have as many ribbons as I have. And since everyone else at that party is going to be wearing—oh, don't argue with me now, for heaven's sake!"

She laid out the uniform without another word, spreading it on the bed with tender care. She took out his soft, high-topped boots and brushed them to a dull, fuzzy suede finish.

Bedlow strode into the bathroom, and another camera came on. The screen split to show both scenes.

While Bedlow stepped through the needle spray, Diane took off her house-jumper and selected a rather plain but neat gown from the closet catalogue. She started to dial.

"Get my belt and pistol out, will you, honey?" Bedlow called from the bathroom. "The dress job with the iridite handle. You don't need to worry; it's not loaded."

Diane stopped dialing and walked over to the small arms case. She selected a dress pistol and a belt that would match the Exec formal. Then she went back and dialed her dress. When it slid out, she put it carefully beside her husband's suit.

Bedlow ran a vibroshave quickly across his face while Diane slipped out of her undergarments and reached for a robe. Bedlow came out of the bathroom just as she was about to put it on.

He stopped, enraptured. "Darling, you look beautiful. Come here."

She smiled a little, dropped the robe, and walked toward him.

The screen went blank, jolting Bedlow violently out of the scene. Dr. Mauserton had cut the switch.

"I hardly think it necessary to watch the rest of the scene," he said. "Although, I assure you, it gave us a great deal of vitally needed information about your wife."

"That it may have done," Bedlow snapped. "But you mishandled the job—botched it badly. And I want my—"

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"—money back," Mauserton completed neatly. "Yes, I've gathered that by now. But I still can't see why."

"The psychotomy operation you were supposed to perform was to remove her fear of crowds. You did not tell me it would change her personality so much I can't recognize her."

Dr. Mauserton lowered his brows. "I see what the difficulty is. But let's clear up some of your misconceptions first, shall we? May I ask just how you expected us to remove a fear that your wife didn't have to begin with?"

"Didn't *have?* What the hell do you mean? Diane was terribly afraid of crowds. That party we went to, for instance—" He gestured vaguely toward the now-dead screen. "She hardly said a word to anybody. She just huddled up and wouldn't talk. She avoided everyone. How can you say she had no fear of crowds?"

"I can say it because it's true," said Mauserton. "She wasn't afraid of crowds at all. She was afraid of people."

Bedlow frowned. His massive brows drew together like a pair of shaggy caterpillars crawling toward each other. "Afraid of people—afraid of crowds. What's the difference, may I ask?"

Mauserton countered with another question. "What's the difference between being afraid of forests and being afraid of trees?"

"I don't follow you," Bedlow said, still frowning.

"An individual is not a crowd, obviously," said Mauserton. "A person suffering from multiphobia is afraid of crowds, not people. Individuals don't bother him in the slightest. If he's not confronted with more than a few people, he's perfectly comfortable. Do you follow me?"

"Go on," Bedlow said impatiently.

"Somewhere in this person's mind there is a critical limit set up. As soon as he is surrounded by more than a certain number of people, his subconscious says: 'This is not a few people, this is a crowd.' And his multiphobia sets in. But the anthropophobe is completely different. He—or she—is afraid of individuals. He is afraid of one single person, and, naturally, even more afraid of two people. This, too, sets off a relay in the mind, but in this case it works in a completely opposite fashion."

"How so?"

"When the critical point has been reached," Mauserton explained slowly, "the subconscious mind of the anthropophobe says, 'This is a crowd.' From that point on, the person has reached his saturation point. One or a dozen more people added to the crowd won't give him a fear he ceased to feel the instant it became a crowd.

"There is another difference. The multiphobe is bothered by the mere physical presence of a crowd—pe-

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riod. But the anthropophobe isn't afraid of crowds. He's afraid of them as a collection of *people*. In a crowd of strangers who are ignoring him, he can ignore them, because they're nonentities. But put him in a group where he is expected to accept them as individuals, and he goes into a tizzy." Mauserton paused.

"What about my wife?" asked Bedlow. "How does she fit in? I thought she was a multiphobe."

"Quite the contrary," said the psychometrist. "Your wife was an anthropophobe. She could walk down the street without too much trouble because the crowd around her ignored her. At the parties, she froze up from fear because the people were *people*."

"I think I see the difference," Bedlow said, after a few seconds of considering Mauserton's statement. "But what does this have to do with my wife's change?"

"The difficulty here arises from the nature of the relationship between you and your wife. You had a relatively short trial period before your orthomarriage, didn't you?"

"About three months," Bedlow admitted. "Rather less than usual, but we felt we were sure."

Mauserton nodded. "To go back a moment. Nearly everyone is afraid of people to some slight extent. For instance, take stage fright. A perfectly normal person finds himself confronted by a vast group of—not nonentities who are ignoring him—but *people*. Now magnify that feeling by a big factor, and you get your wife's fear."

Suddenly Mauserton stared deeply into the other man's eyes. "The reason you came back to us dissatisfied is this: *your wife was terribly, terribly afraid of you*. We simply removed that fear. And that's what the contract called for."

"But you're surely not trying to claim—"

Dr. Mausterton flashed a professional smile. "The psychic operation was perfectly successful. The specifications were met. I think it's more than a little unfair of you to come raging into my office to demand a refund. I want you to know that this whole scene has been most distressing to me."

"Most distressing? Most distressing?" Bedlow almost shouted. "If you're distressed, how about me? Do you know what my wife is like, now that you've finished with her? Do you know what it's like in my home these days? Let me tell you, Mauserton—"

The psychometrist cut him off with a quick gesture. "You needn't bother, Mr. Bedlow. I know what it's like."

He studied the filmfile sorter for a moment and then punched another code number into it.

The screen on the wall began to glow.

"Here's a scene we took after the completion of your wife's treatment."

"But I thought you removed those cameras!" Bedlow protested,

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flushing crimson. "What sort of people are you, anyway?"

"Hush, please. The scene is already under way."

Bedlow turned and stared at the moving figures on the wall . . .

"Diane, I simply *can't,*" Bedlow heard his own voice say.

And then the whole scene began to unroll before him—the scene that had sent him storming the next day into the offices of the Institute of Applied Psychosurgery.

She held out the gun to him and whirled the chamber to show the cartridges gleaming ominously through the translucent chamber. "Here," she said. "It's going to look fine. And for goodness sake, don't whine like that, Johnny."

Bedlow took the gun from her and contemplated it glumly. "It just *isn't* done. How could I walk into an Executive Recreation with a loaded gun? It—well, people don't *do* that anymore. Not with dress guns—at least not with one that so blatantly advertises the fact that it's loaded."

"That's silly," Diane said. "You know perfectly well that half the people there will be carrying loaded weapons. Besides, the clerk assured me that the only sane thing to do was to load the gun, as long as you're carrying one. After all, they're for protection too, you know. But let's not argue about it, shall we? It's so tiresome."

She moved to the closet catalogue and dialed a dress, while Bedlow watched her quick, vibrant motions. The dress slid out.

"Get me my usual dress pistol," he said. "Enough of this nonsense."

"What nonsense?" she asked evenly. "I bought you a new gun especially for tonight's party, and here you are refusing even to consider the idea of wearing it. If I didn't love you I might get insulted."

"*Get me the old dress pistol,*" Bedlow repeated.

"If you insist, John. These quarrels are so tiresome." She undid her robe and dropped it on the bed. "I'll get the old gun for you in a minute. Let me get into my dress first."

"Did you hear me?" Bedlow said, feeling his face grow hot with anger. "Diane, I said—"

"Just a minute, silly! There's no reason why I should have to hop at your every command."

Quite deliberately she selected a bra and step-ins and put them on. Even through his rage Bedlow noticed that the bra was one that he had never seen before, one which provided support but not much cover. That dress of hers must be cut down to *here,* he thought.

"Diane!"

She turned coolly to face him. "Yes, John?"

"Is that what that operation did for you? I spent all that money, threw it into that Institute just to turn you into an insolent little—" He groped for words.

"So much fuss just because I

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wouldn't get daddy's gun for him?" Diane said, half-cooing. She moved closer to him. "You know, you look so cute when you're all red and angry."

She stretched up on tiptoes and took a playful nibble at the tip of his nose. "Why shouldn't daddy get his own little gun? Daddy knows where it's kept."

"I gave you a direct command and you deliberately ignored it."

She cut him off. "No more fuss," she said softly. "No arguing."

She stepped even closer to him, and the next thing he knew, despite his anger, despite her brand-new recalcitrance, despite everything, she was in his arms and he found himself surrendering to her.

It was an unprecedented sort of situation for him, this business of having her take the lead, and he wasn't at all sure he liked the idea.

Later, when he had had a chance to think it over, he was certain he didn't. Not at all . . .

"There!" Bedlow shouted, as Dr. Mauserton cut the scene again. "That's exactly what I meant! That's not the woman I married! Look at her hair! Her hair is different, her eyes are different, even the way she handles herself—"

"Naturally," said Mauserton. "When a person's afraid of something, it shows. You can *see* the fear. Diane Bedlow is no longer living in a constant state of terror. She's not afraid of you, so she doesn't jump every time you say jump."

Bedlow clenched his fists, anger boiling up within him. "You've stolen her love for me, damn you! You've cut it out and thrown it away like something rotten! You brain-butchers!"

"Not brain-butchers, Mr. Bedlow. We operate on the mind, not the brain. The term 'surgery' is used in a much wider sense than you seem to think."

"I know what you mean," said Bedlow. "And you know what I mean. Her love for me is gone."

Mauserton looked him in the eyes. "Do you really think her love for you was born of the fear she had of you? That's not very clear thinking, Mr. Bedlow. But it's characteristic of you. We've studied you just as carefully as we have your wife, you know. In any husband-wife case we take on, that's standard procedure. After all, an orthomarriage such as yours is the most binding there is. We have to make sure that we know the complete psychological pattern of both partners."

"And I still say you've ruined her," Bedlow said harshly. "You've destroyed our marriage because of your breach of contract. I'm going to sue you for everything I can get." He paused, and his eyes narrowed down. "Unless, of course, you'll agree to put her back the way she was, before she decided I was a carnival bear to be led around by the nose."

Mauserton smiled, but there was something odd behind the smile. "Do you mean to say that you'd

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rather have her with her fear than without it? I'm afraid that's absolutely impossible. And let me remind you, Mr. Bedlow, that you can't sue us. If you don't believe me, you can check the contract."

He punched at the filmfile sorter again. The screen lit up, filled with fine print. It began to move as Dr. Mauserton turned a control, then it stopped and enlarged.

"Here we are," the psychometrist said. He then read the contract aloud from the screen: "'And, whereas the petitioners agree that the Institute shall do its utmost to alleviate the problem of the petitioner—'

"You see," he went on, "that means the petitioner's *real problem*. It has nothing to do with what you may have thought the problem was."

"The problem *is* specified," Bedlow snapped, almost choking with anger. It seemed to him that Mauserton was leading him in circles, cleverly dancing him around wherever he wished.

Mauserton spun the control again. The screen now said: "And, whereas the petitioners state that the symptoms of the problem are, to wit:—" There followed a list of Bedlow's complaints against his wife.

"So you see," said the psychometrist, "what you gave were the symptoms of the problem, not the problem itself. We decide what the problem is in our pre-therapy analysis."

Bedlow stood up. "All right, so I can't get at you—you think. Remember, Mauserton, I'm a pretty powerful man. You aren't the Government yet, by God! I'm going to smash you, Mauserton, and I'm going to smash your whole precious Institute!"

Mauserton leaned back and smiled up at the big man. "I'm glad we have all this on tape," he said coolly. "It will confirm our diagnosis if this is ever brought to court—which I doubt."

"Diagnosis?" Bedlow's reaction was as if someone had just spoken to him in a foreign language—as though Mauserton had just said something completely incomprehensible.

The psychometrician nodded. "We were perfectly sure you'd come back down here, Bedlow. It happens almost invariably. You see, you—like your wife—are an anthropophobe. You're afraid of your fellow man, just as she was. But you covered it up differently. Instead of trying to be inconspicuous, hiding from everyone, you covered by trying to make everyone afraid of you—as afraid as you are of them. You are a bully. You want your wife meek and submissive instead of wanting a woman with a mind and a will of her own.

"And yet, oddly enough, you didn't realize how much you loved your wife until the change became apparent. She's no longer afraid of you, but she still loves you—loves

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you enough to want to stay with you in spite of your fears.

"But the reason you want your old wife back is because you are afraid of the new one. Whereas, before, you never worried about whether you pleased her or not, now you're deathly afraid that you won't please her—not only in little ways, but sexually. And I don't need to tell you what effect *that's* having on your relationship."

Bedlow's massive face reddened in embarrassment and anger. "I don't have to listen to this! I told you I'd smash you, and I meant it! You can't talk to me that way and get away with it!" He suddenly realized that further talk was useless. He was only infuriating himself. He turned and walked toward the door.

And bumped his nose on it.

The door should have opened automatically at his approach. It didn't. It remained firmly, purposefully shut.

Burning with fear, anger, shame, and hate, Bedlow spun, drawing his pistol from the case at his side.

"Open this door, Mauserton," he said through clenched teeth. "Open it, or so help me, I'll put a bullet through you."

"I have no doubt you would," Mauserton assured him. "You certainly have the capacity to destroy anything you fear. And right now you fear me and the Institute more than anything else in the world—with the possible exception of yourself."

"Damn you!" Bedlow's voice was punctuated by the sharp explosion of the weapon in his hand.

"All right," Mauserton snapped. "Grab him."

The door behind Bedlow had opened silently, and while he was still standing, dumbfounded by the uselessness of his gun, a pair of hands grabbed each of his arms.

He jerked away spasmodically, and the gun fired again—impotently. "Blanks!" he whispered accusingly.

There was a tangle of arms as he tried to pull away from the two burly Institute guards who had hold of him, but Bedlow, big as he was, could do nothing against their powerful grips. One of them twisted his hand, and the pistol fell to the floor. A pair of magnetic cuffs snapped his wrists together.

He stood there for a moment after the hands of the guards released him, looking at his cuffs. He knew that if he tried to move, more than likely he'd get a stiff jolt from a magnetic field that would throw him to the floor and hold him there.

Slowly the anger drained out of him, but not the fear. He looked up at Mauserton. "What are you going to do?"

The psychometrist's voice was almost apologetic. "I'm sorry I had to make you explode like that, but it was necessary."

"What are you going to do?" Bedlow repeated.

"Psychotomize you. Take that obsessive fear out of you. We won't—

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we can't—touch the normal fear that everyone feels when in danger. But you'll lose the abnormal fear, just as your wife did."

"You can't do that," Bedlow said dully. It was almost as though he had given up—it was only a token protest.

"I'm afraid we can," Mauserton said. "The contract is just as binding on you as it is on your wife. A man and wife are legally one entity, you know. And you are part of her problem, too—part of the problem you both have."

Bedlow glared at him. "When I get out, I'll smash you," he said. "If I'm not afraid of you, I'll not hesitate to destroy the Institute."

"No," the doctor said. "People only destroy the things they fear. When we get through, there will be no reason for you to hate or fear us. Do you think this is the first time we've had your kind of problem to resolve? Don't you think we've been threatened before? We have, I can assure you. And yet, not one of our patients has ever hated us afterwards."

"That's because they have no minds of their own," Bedlow said, regaining some of his spirit.

"Does your wife have no mind of her own? Do you think I have none? I've gone through the same thing, Bedlow."

"My wife will still wonder where I am," Bedlow said desperately. "She'll wonder what's happened. She knows I came down here. You can't get away with this, Mauserton."

A soft voice behind him said: "Yes. Yes, I knew you came down here."

He jerked his head around. "Diane!"

She wasn't smiling, but her face looked tender. "I'm sorry, dearest. I know how you feel. It—it's the same way I felt, but I just didn't have the guts to fight it."

"You put blanks in my gun," Bedlow said. "Blanks. So I couldn't get away."

"Yes," she said. "I did, my darling."

"And now they'll change my mind *all around*," he said bleakly. He sounded lost.

"Not just *your* mind—*ours*. They're going to change the *rest* of *our* mind. And they'll make it better, believe me."

"All right," he said. His voice was bitter. "I suppose it's a woman's right to—to change her mind." He looked at the guards. "Let's go. I don't want to talk to her. Maybe I will later."

When the door closed behind them, Diane turned to the now-silent Mauserton. "Am I doing the right thing, Doctor?"

Mauserton smiled. "The best answer is the one your husband tried to give and can't—yet. 'A woman's right to change her mind.' "

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for men must work—

by . . . F. B. Bryning

Until the stars grow pale and valor wears a safety-belt the wife of a spaceman must grieve.

FERRY *Rocket Nine* pointed her needle prow back along the orbit of Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two, with which, for the time being, she circled Earth every ninety minutes. A silver torpedo, winged like a schoolboy's paper dart, with a high, vertical tail fin, she hung apparently motionless against the star-spotted blackness of space, three chains to starboard of Vehicle 18, Space Terminal.

Suddenly her main jet spurted flame, and she shot rapidly astern of the Station. For seconds only she blasted, but when cut-off came she was invisible in the distance and the darkness. Stern first, she still trailed after SSSC2, but she no longer had velocity enough to stay in orbit. She had entered the long spiral that would take her down into the earth's atmosphere, five hundred miles below.

Barbara Loney, aboard *FR9*, sighed with relief as Vehicle 18 disappeared from her viewport, and with it her contact with the Space Station. To her the limitless, black, star-studded void was harsh and menacing. She had been unable to

Few indeed are the writers who do not strive to surpass themselves at times by becoming just a trifle over-dramatic. But F. B. Bryning never does. He writes always with an assured convincingness, and as a spectator at the events he chronicles—a spectator so carried away by what he has seen and heard that his one overmastering desire is to come up with a faithful recording. And that makes for refreshing and unusual science fantasy entertainment, as witness this exciting documentary portrayal of space hazards daringly surmounted.

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see in it the wonder, the beauty, the ever-beckoning adventure, the great pioneering opportunity, her husband saw there. His work, as Chief Maintenance Engineer, Rockets, for all his high-sounding title, special rate of pay, spaceman's bonuses, and long earth-furloughs, had become for her a nightmare of hazardous escapades.

When Jim was on duty she would be either, distracted from her own work as Librarian-Records Clerk in Vehicle 7 — Residential-Recreation —or would stay cooped up in their comfortably equipped but none-theless prison-like quarters, worrying and agonizing about his safety.

In short, as she had told herself for the hundredth time, she was not cut out to be a spaceman's wife. She could not think of any space-going quarters as a home, even though she and Jim should cohabit there. She had finally told him so—and hated herself for the hurt it gave him.

She yearned for a bright blue sky every twelve hours instead of black and star-glitter all the time. She wanted the solid earth and the green grass underfoot instead of metal and plastic decking. She wanted constant, if heavy, earth-gravity instead of the centrifugal pressure which, according to how near you were to the centre of the spinning R-R Vehicle, varied from one gravity to absolute weightlessness. She wanted fresh, earth-scented, if germ-laden, sun-and-rain-cleared air instead of the aseptic, machine-washed and precipitron-cleared oxygen-helium mixture. She longed for a small cottage with windows to open and shut, a garden, and—of all things—a picket fence. She wanted a *real* home.

So she had persuaded Jim to apply for the position of Superintendent, Rocket Maintenance, Woomera—a job for which he was well qualified although little inclined.

"Time enough when I've served my full stint out here and we've piled up more money in the bank," he had protested. "And I'll be better able to handle such a job when I've had more experience with operating conditions in space."

" 'For men must work, and women must weep,' " she had quoted rather bitterly in reply. "More important that you survive your stint in space. And the surest way to do that is not to stay too long! And it's time we had a home we can call a home!"

In the end she had had her way, and Jim was even now one hour ahead of her, in *FR5*, First Division of the Station-Woomera-Station Ferry for the day. By the time she landed he would, no doubt, be leaving their hotel room for his personal interview with the Appointments Board. Perversely, tears welled into her eyes in the midst of her hopes and rosy dreams, for she felt remorseful still at having forced Jim's hand. If only she could be strong, and confident, as a spaceman's wife should be! If only she were not the worrying kind . . .

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"I think it was very mean of them to separate us from our husbands," complained newly-wed Jean Urquhart, placing a hand on Barbara's arm.

"A tribute to our petite figures, my dear," she replied comfortingly, "and to the solid worth of our husbands. They always pass a few pounds of mass from one Division to another at the last minute to even up the loads, and the easiest way is to exchange a few lightweight passengers for some heavyweights."

"But since we're all weightless, out here, I don't see that it matters."

"We'll weigh plenty when the atmosphere drag is braking the ship," said Barbara. 'That's when it counts—during deceleration and landing."

"Well, they might have picked some of the unmarried ones."

"They did with Beryl Sanders, over there—she's not married. But of course they do it by arithmetic and not by sentiment. At such times, dear, you and I and our hefty husbands are only entries in the 'Mass' column on the passenger list."

Jean grasped Barbara's arm again as a gentle vibration began to make itself felt throughout the Ferry. "What's that?" she gasped.

"Just the steering jets—swinging the nose of the ship around to point the way we are going. It wouldn't do to enter the atmosphere tail first."

It was about fifty minutes after leaving the Station and *FR9* had gone nearly half way around the Earth when Barbara detected a slight tendency to slide forward against her seat belt.

"Better tighten your seat belt, Jean, and put on your chest belt," she said, tapping her companion's arm. "We're entering the atmosphere now. The ship is beginning to feel the drag."

Jean gave Barbara an almost worshipful look a minute later when the notice screen lit up with the message, *"Please fix chest belts,"* and the co-pilot came into the passenger cabin to check on every belt.

Soon the murmur of the rushing air outside pervaded the ship, minute by minute increasing in volume as they planed into the denser strata. The pressure of the belts grew greater, holding them back.

Wide-eyed, and gripping the arms of her seat, Jean strove to remain calm as the wind grew stronger, its rushing sound mounting to a roar as the ship tensed, with minor creakings and crepitations, all about her. Her tendency to slide forward off her seat drove her ever harder against the belts, and convinced her that she was no longer weightless.

It was her first trip down from the Station, planing, unpowered, through the atmosphere, and more trying than the short, fully powered rocket trip up, with all its muscle-

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wrenching acceleration. Later, when the roar became a howl, she watched with wary fascination the leading edge of the starboard wing grow cherry-red, and the color slowly spread over all that part of the wing visible through the port.

Through darkness and daylight and darkness again they went in something more than two hours between leaving SSSC2 and gliding in over Western Australia to touch down at Woomera in mid-morning.

"I don't see Harry," complained Jean Urquhart a moment later, as they came out through the still warm hull into the desert air which Barbara sniffed with pleasure. Barbara had not expected to see Jim, who would be even now on his way to his interview.

Laboring a little in the full earth gravity they reached the public lounge of the spaceport, where Jean's questing for her husband was cut short by the public address system.

"Paging Mrs. James Loney and Mrs. Henry Urquhart! Mrs. James Loney and Mrs. Henry Urquhart—please come to the Traffic Manager's office. Paging Mrs. . . ."

They were shown in at once, to be received by the young-middle-aged Traffic Manager as if he were handling eggshell china. Both girls began to feel alarmed as he moved the chairs under them with great solicitude. Behind his desk he remained standing. He buttoned his coat nervously, and placed his hands on the back of his swivel chair.

"I am afraid," he began, "I must give you ladies some rather disturbing news. The fact is—well, I have to inform you that *Ferry Rocket Five*, which left the Station before your rocket, has not yet landed."

"Harry!" cried Jean. "My husband—"

Too late! came the bitter thought to Barbara as a sick feeling hit her like a blow in the stomach. *Too late! It has happened before we could get away!*

Suddenly she realized that Jean was in her ams, sobbing, and kneeling on the floor. She, herself, had been sitting tense and unheeding for a long minute. The Traffic Manager was saying something unheard by Jean or herself. He was looking embarrassed. Barbara made an effort.

"I'm sorry," she said, through set teeth. "I—*we* didn't hear what you—"

"I didn't mean to frighten you," he said. "Please don't assume the worst. *FR5* is disabled, but no one is injured—yet. She has been hit by a meteorite and is out of control in a new orbit between the orbit of the Station and the fringe of the atmosphere. Help is on the way from the Station. We hope it may be in time."

FERRY *Rocket Five* was tumbling raggedly through space with half her starboard wing and part of her tail fin torn away. She had a cork-

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screwing motion, the result of a tail-over-nose rotation about her short axis, but she was also spinning slowly around her long axis.

Fortunately the impact of the meteorite, which had been from behind and below on the starboard side, had accelerated her again, canceling out much of the deceleration by which she had begun her journey down to Earth. Fortunate it was, for now there would be more time before she would enter the atmosphere—and in that time she might be saved.

Imperatively, if she were to be saved, it would have to be in that time. If, with her airfoils torn and distorted, and her outer skin breached as it was, she were to enter the atmosphere, she would go more wildly out of control. She would be tossed about with tremendous violence, and almost inevitably be torn apart.

If, by some miracle, she should hold together long enough to reach the denser air strata at a velocity between four and five miles a second, the hull would be heated to a dull red, and both her disrupted thermal insulation, and her refrigeration system, if still functioning, would be unable to keep the heat at bay.

These hazards had been promptly recognized by everyone as soon as *FR5*'s Captain had reported his predicament by jury-rigged radio. Help could come, in the time, only from SSSC2, and all the Station's personnel who could help in the rescue were going all-out to do so. Particularly were they busy aboard Vehicles 16 and 17, Maintenance.

A warning buzz from the wall near his desk informed the Traffic Manager to cut in the speaker.

Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two was reporting that *FR5* had been located by radar and two space tugs were on their way to assist her. *Moon Rocket 8* had just arrived at Vehicle 18, Space Terminal, from the Moon, and was being re-fueled and cleared of cargo to follow the tugs and take off passengers from *FR5*, if possible.

On *FR5* a man had gone outside in a space suit to weld an air leak —a precarious feat with the ship tumbling and writhing as she was.

At this last item of news Barbara's hands clenched and her lips drew into a tight line. She knew who that hero would be! James Loney, Chief Maintenance Engineer, Rockets, and trouble-shooter extraordinary!

When the radio confirmed her guess a few seconds later she accepted the near-homage of Jean as graciously as her mixed fear, pride, and desperate hope permitted. But down inside her she felt stark terror such as she had never felt when "out there" on the Station on similar occasions when she had known Jim was running special risks.

It felt very different, here, on the ground — remote and excluded from any sense of contact with Jim. She was, in fact, no longer "with"

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him, either in space or, it seemed, in spirit. She found herself, in her turn, clutching Jean.

And at that same instant James Loney was clinging like a limpet to the plunging hull of *FR5* as he finished off sealing the air leak. Down on magnetic knee-pads he held himself rigid by straining up against the two short lines fastened to the belt of his space suit and hooked into recessed hand-holds in the hull.

He kept his eyes on the skin of the ship, for space-hardened though he was, he could not look for long without getting dizzy at the wildly spiraling stars and the huge, greenish balloon of Earth, filling half the sky, and looming unpredictably past from any direction.

Beneath him, at one moment, the hull drove upwards, carrying him before it as it swung over like the sail of a windmill, and he had to brace himself against it or sprawl on his face. A few seconds later, as the sideways spin slowly turned the ship on its long axis, he was carried around behind the "windmill" movement and dragged after it, so that only the lines held him against the hull. Between thrust and drag and thrust again he had to hold the pressure on knees, toes, and the lashings to resist slipping sideways.

He was clawing his way back to the airlock, to stow the welding kit, when the searchlights of the two tugs flooded the hull of *FR5* with light. By space-suit radio he made contact with them. The three men aboard each tug were of his own crew and all were ready in space suits. By tacit consent he took charge.

"Here's the situation," he told them. "We can't take passengers out until we stop this ship flinging about. If we do that in time we won't need to trans-ship passengers at all. You tugs can take her back to the Station.

"First, though, we must get about four bottles of oxygen into this airlock to keep them supplied inside. She's lost too much air, and there might be a few smaller leaks than the one I've just sealed. Stacy and Adams—you break out that oxygen and bring it over. Acknowledge please."

"Stacy acknowledging — four bottles of oxygen—coming."

Adams, in turn, repeated the words.

"Don't try to come aboard yet," said Loney. "Jet over and wait alongside at the pole of the short axis around which we're rotating. I'll meet you there."

Stacy and Adams acknowledged together.

"Get started . . . Hobday?" Jim asked.

"Hobday acknowledging."

"You break out one Mark Four reaction motor, with full fuel tank, and bring it to me at the short axis of rotation. Right?"

Hobday repeated his instructions.

"Go ahead . . . Miles?" Jim asked.

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"Yes, Jim. Miles speaking."

"You break out a full reserve fuel tank for Hobday's Mark Four," said Jim. "Also break out two Mark One reactors, fully fueled. Stand by to bring them when asked for."

As Miles repeated his instructions Loney took two coiled lines from the airlock. Clipping one to his belt he fastened the other just outside the airlock hatch, and, trailing it after him, worked his way from hand-hold to hand-hold thirty feet or so along the hull to the short axis about which the nose and tail of the hundred-and-twenty-foot ship were rotating.

There he clung for a few moments, clipping his short belt lines on and adjusting himself to the motion, which here was much less violent than up near the nose where he had been welding.

Facing forward he got carefully to his feet, placing his magnetic oversoles firmly on the steel hull and keeping his belt lines—one in front and one behind—taut. Thus braced and guyed he stood like a stubby mast on the back of the *Ferry Rocket*.

As it somersaulted he went with it, and because it also spun slowly on its long axis, his upright figure followed a skewed and complex spiral which was compounded of two circular motions at right angles to one another; and the orbital path of the ship.

By the time Stacy and Adams had come alongside, and adjusted their relative motions so as to hang stationary in relation to the short axis, they found that Loney's head would swing diagonally past them at about fifteen-second intervals. First from one side, then from the other, he would come at them and swing away, passing sometimes within arm's length and sometimes up to twenty feet away.

"Stacy," said Loney as he swung past, "give your oxygen to Adams, and prepare to come aboard. Next time round I'll throw you a line."

Stacy was ready as soon as Loney's head came into view again. At the same moment the line came at him like a white whiplash in the light from the tugs.

"Take a turn around your wrist and hold on," said Jim Loney, taking in the slack as he came close.

When he began to recede he pulled gently, letting the line run a little through his heavily gloved hands to ease the initial strain.

Stacy came aboard like a game fish, striking the hull about ninety degrees around its circumference from Loney.

"Guy yourself with a line front and back, like mine," instructed Loney. "Cast off my line as soon as you're fast."

Four circuits later Loney threw the line to Adams, who quickly clipped it into the hand-hold of one oxygen bottle. Loney led this like a kite until it floated gently alongside Stacy, who unhooked it.

Seeing Hobday approaching with

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the heavy reaction motor, Loney announced a change of procedure.

"Stand by, Adams, while we get that reactor aboard. Stacy—you get that bottle of oxygen inside the ship. They'll be able to wait for the others if you give them that. We'll get the rest aboard easier when we stop this spin. Leave your guy lines there."

Stacy unhooked his lines and struggled with the oxygen bottle along the line Loney had laid down to the airlock.

At Loney's direction Hobday relinquished the reaction motor to Admas, and was brought aboard to take Stacy's place. Loney threw the line again to Adams, who hooked it on to the massive reaction motor. This was a much more sluggish item than either a man or an oxygen bottle, and Loney kept a short line on it until he had it moving.

The strain on his arms and body and belt lines almost tore him off the ship, but he had to prevent the motor swinging about and perhaps injuring Hobday. When he had it following nicely he eased off the line and let it come within Hobday's reach.

"Hold it down until it matches motion with the ship," he instructed. When this was done Loney drew the motor to him, and maneuvered it around him until its jet pointed at right angles to the long axis of the ship—that is, into the direction of the ship's spin. Then he switched on the powerful electro-magnetic grips and it snapped tight against the hull.

"Grapples too?" enquired Hobday, crawling up alongside.

"Four," agreed Loney. Then he called to Adams.

"Adams acknowledging."

"Stand clear of blast!" said Jim.

Hobday ran two pairs of grappling claws on chains out to the nearest hand-holds in front of the reaction motor and hauled them tight while Loney checked and adjusted his controls.

"All secure!" reported Hobday.

"Is Stacy inside the airlock?"

"Yes. Airlock closed."

"Adams standing clear?"

"Well clear."

"Stand by for blast!"

Just as they rolled out of the glare of the searchlights Loney pressed the firing trigger and a brilliant white flame shot twenty feet into the blackness of space. Beneath them the ship vibrated. But, through the emptiness around them no sound came from the flame which in an atmosphere would have roared like any rocket. There came instead a humming and a vibration through the substance of the motor, the hull, and their own flesh and bone.

Gradually Loney opened up the throttle, his eyes on the gauge. He held the needle steady, and then gave some attention to the alternation of light and darkness as the spin took them in and out of the searchlights.

"She's slowing down," called

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Hobday. "Circuit about nineteen seconds now."

"We'll have a bigger fight with the tumbling," said Loney. "I'll take this reactor up to the tail. You get Miles aboard with the other charge of fuel and both Mark One reactors. Leave Stacy and Adams to get that oxygen inboard."

"Okay. I'll call Miles now."

"Getting slower," remarked Loney a short time later. "How long's the circuit?"

Hobday timed it. "Twenty-seven seconds."

Shortly after that Loney began to taper off the blast, until, slowly, with the dying out of the flame, the spinning of the ship had stopped altogether. Her motion was now the less complex but still powerful tumbling.

Hobday released the grapples and wound them in.

"You had better stand out at the end of the short axis," said Loney. "You'll turn about like a top but you'll stay in one position, and you'll get your men aboard easily."

"Don't you need a hand first?"

"No thanks. Now that she's not spinning I can stay in front of the swing all the time. The thrust will hold me on—and the reactor too. I'll slide it along . . ."

"OH!" exclaimed Barbara, jumping to her feet as the Traffic Manager cut off his radio speaker. "I had forgotten!"

"What's the matter?" pleaded Jean, alarm in her eyes.

"Jim's interview! He had an interview with the Appointments Board—" Barbara looked at her watch "it was for eleven thirty—seven minutes from now." She turned to the Traffic Manager. "Could I—I mean, I think I should inform the Board—ask them to—to postpone—"

The Traffic Manager took up his telephone. "I'll contact the Secretary of the Board now," he said. "You can speak from here."

"Thank you," said Barbara, inwardly amazed that she was able to concern herself with an immediate practical matter while Jim was out there fighting for his life. Yet she felt that it was all the more important now—for both their sakes, if he survived—that he should not lose his chance of getting that ground job.

"I would like to make my request in person, to the Board, if I may," she added.

Meanwhile, between the base of the tail fin and the damaged driving jet, Loney anchored his reaction motor with the magnetic clamps and the grapples. He swung the nozzle to point straight "upwards"—at right angles to the long axis of the ship and into the direction she was tumbling. Then he went to meet Hobday and Miles half-way from amidships. He took from them his refill tank of fuel.

"Hobday, take your Mark One out on the starboard wing, just two feet from the edge and aft as close as you can get to where the wing

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is twisted. Clamp on and aim at ninety degrees. Miles, you do the same on the port wing, matching Hobday's position exactly. Lie down, both of you, with your feet towards the hull, and lash on."

By the time Loney had returned to his reactor and lashed down his reserve fuel tank, Hobday and Miles reported ready.

"Stand by to compensate in case she starts spinning again," Loney instructed. "Set jets at half throttle and be ready to fire when I tell you."

Loney sat behind his reactor, one leg on either side wedged beneath a grapple chain. He took hold of the hand grips and sighted on the stars, which streamed up over the torn tail-fin like tracer bullets. He found the firing trigger with his forefinger.

"Stand by for blast!"

THE CHAIRMAN of the Appointments Board and his two fellow Members stood behind their table as Barbara Loney entered the room. After introductions the Chairman led her to a chair.

"Mrs. Loney," he said, his expression solicitous. "Permit us to offer our best hopes that your husband is even now winning his splendid battle to save *Ferry Rocket Five.* We feel that in these circumstances we could not refuse to see you, or to tell you personally that your request for postponement of his interview would certainly be granted, *if he should wish it.*"

" 'If he should—,' " echoed Barbara. "I can assure you, Mr. Chairman, there is no doubt—"

"There, there! Don't let us rush things," said the Chairman, in a fatherly manner. "I am sure we understand exactly how you feel at a time like this." He had walked around the table to his own chair, and the three men took their seats. "This is not a formal meeting of the Board. Speak as freely as you like. We are glad of the opportunity to meet you."

"Thank you, Mr. Chairman—and Gentlemen," replied Barbara. "I—I feel, at this moment, that all I can really be concerned with is my husband's safety. It's all I *should* be concerned with. But since he cannot keep his appointment with you—"

"We understand, Mrs. Loney. Your husband is a fortunate man to have a wife so resourceful. And in the circumstances, while he is fighting for the lives of himself and others, we could hardly fail to stretch a point, if necessary, on his behalf. However, the next Bulletin from Station Two is almost due. Please stay while we hear it."

At that moment the star stream began to slant from port to starboard, and the greenish curve of Earth bulged in. Loney cut off his jet.

"Hobday—short blast! Three seconds."

Flame spurted up from the starboard wing, and slowly *FR5* responded to the pressure. Loney

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watched the shooting stars swing back towards the vertical, and Earth float away like a balloon.

"Two seconds more," he demanded. "Miles—stand by to compensate!"

As soon as the ship was trimmed she vibrated again under the heavy blast of Loney's reactor. After some seconds it seemed—from their tendency to float away from the ship "beneath" them, and the slowing of the star movements—that the rotation was being retarded. Again the stars swung off to starboard, and a sector of the earth came into view.

"Hobday—blast seven seconds! Miles—stand by!"

There was a brief static hum.

Loney fired again, opening up to the fullest. This time he did not cut off before his fuel petered out. Now their lashings had definitely been needed to hold them back with the ship as its lessening thrust beneath them made it clear she was slowing down. And the stars could now be seen as discreet dots, swinging this time from starboard to port.

"Miles—blast five seconds!"

Loney released his empty fuel tank and laid hold of the reserve.

"IT APPEARS, Gentlemen, that Chief Maintenance Engineer Loney has virtually succeeded in saving *Ferry Rocket Five*," said the Chairman of the Appointments Board. "In which case do you think it premature to inform Mrs. Loney, unofficially, of course, of what we have in mind?"

"Quite the appropriate time, I should think," said the Member on Barbara's left.

The other nodded. "I agree. Since meeting Mrs. Loney I am more than reassured that we are making the right decision. She is undoubtedly the right kind of wife for a space-going officer."

"The fact is, Mrs. Loney," said the Chairman, "we had already decided not to appoint your husband Superintendent of Rocket Maintenance, Woomera, although he is well qualified. He is much too good a man in space to waste his talents in a ground job at his age."

"But Mr. Cha—"

"Now don't underrate what I have to tell you," pleaded the Chairman, hastily. "We have a much better post for him. He will outrank that ground job considerably—and we know it is something he will like much better. We have known his worth and his predilections for a long time, and his present valiant performance has confirmed to the hilt our estimate of him. We are going to appoint him Officer in Charge, Maintenance, Satellite Space Station Commonwealth Two!"

He beamed, and the rest of the Board smiled indulgently at Barbara's astonishment.

"But—but—Mr. Chairman! The whole idea—I don't know how—"

"Don't try, my dear," deprecated the Chairman. "No thanks are due

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to us. Your husband has more than earned this promotion, although it is several grades upwards in one move, both in rank and pay. We anticipate that he will not only do the job superlatively well, but that because of his age he will be able to give it the continuity of tenure which has been lacking in the past."

" 'Continuity of tenure' " echoed Barbara, aghast.

"Yes. Until now, as you may know, our appointees to that position have all been men within three, or at most, four years of the age of retirement from active duty in space. Your husband should have a good ten years ahead of him."

"Ten years!" gasped Barbara. "In space for *ten more years.*"

"By then, with yearly increments, you would be very nicely placed financially."

"I wasn't thinking of that, Mr. Chairman," said Barbara, faintly. "My husband's application for the position of Superintendent of Maintenance, Woomera, would not have been made at all if—"

"If he had had any idea that he was in the running for this position," the Chairman cut in. "You need not tell us. We know from his records and other sources that his main enthusiasm is for taking part in what is done out in space. If anyone knows that better than we do, that person will be you. Am I not right?"

Barbara looked at the three men in turn. She saw no way out. She realized she could not win her battle here and now.

"Perfectly right," she acknowledged. "That is what he desires, above all."

"Would you like to be the bearer of the good news? The appointment is yet two months off—due at the end of the furlough you are just beginning. You and your husband can keep it to yourselves?"

He paused at sight of Barbara sitting rigid, eyes closed. When she opened her eyes he saw that they were glittering with unshed tears.

"We can keep the secret, Mr. Chairman," she promised. "May I say on my husband's behalf how delighted he—"

"Here is another Bulletin," said the Member on Barbara's right, and turned up the volume.

"*Ferry Rocket Five* has been stabilized by the efforts of Chief Maintenance Engineer Loney and his crew," announced the radio, from SSSC2. "All aboard are now safe and unharmed. Two space tugs are lashed to the Ferry and are accelerating back into the orbit of the Station. Passengers will be disembarked at the Station to await another Ferry.

"This fortunate outcome has been mainly due to the heroism and skill of Chief Maintenance Engineer James Loney, who, not a moment too soon, handed over *FR5* to his space tugs just as the first noticeable contact was made

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with the atmosphere. As a result of damage to the Ferry's airfoils it began to yaw and plunge before the tugs had warped in properly and made fast. Quick work by Loney with the lines again saved the situation, but he suffered injury when his left leg and arm were momentarily jammed between a tug and the tail fin of *FR5*. He was quickly rescued and taken inboard a tug. It is reported that both the leg and arm have been broken . . ."

White-faced, her eyes closed, Barbara sat gripping the table.

"But men must work, and women must weep,
Though storms be sudden, and waters deep,
And the harbor bar be moaning."

The lines drove into her mind again—to mock, and yet to steady her, with the reminder that she was one with all womankind. The poet Kingsley had not had space-going vessels in mind, and there was no harbor bar, this time—unless it were that fringe of atmosphere in which *FR5* had almost foundered. Yet the age-old axiom he had voiced held true on the new frontiers. And she and Jim were caught up in the ancient dilemma . . .

"Vehicle Eleven, Medical, at the Station, is alerted and ready to receive Chief Maintenance Engineer Loney for immediate attention," continued the radio.

"Mr. Chairman!" Barbara had sprung to her feet. "Can you secure me a berth on this afternoon's Ferry back to the Station?"

"First Priority," agreed the Chairman, picking up his telephone. "No doubt, too, you will want to send a radio?"

FOR SOME moments Barbara—a resigned and defeated though not altogether unhappy Barbara—pondered with pencil in hand over the radiogram form.

MY HERO, she printed, with a wry twist to her mouth. AM RETURNING TODAY'S ROCKET. SEE YOU 1740 HOURS. LOVE. BARBARA.

Yet she signed with a frown, and remained clicking the pencil against her teeth. Somehow it did not quite convey all she wanted to say to him. Then the pencil came back to the paper. She heaved a big sigh.

After RETURNING she inserted the word HOME and passed the message to the waiting operator.

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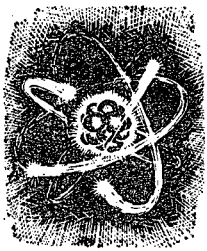

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universe in books

by . . . Hans Stefan Santesson

Our alert critic discusses a diversified array of science fantasy in hard covers—in a season of unusual offerings.

PREFERRED RISK by Edson McCann (Simon and Schuster, $2.75), may not be in the classic tradition, but it *is* the winner of Galaxy's and Simon and Schuster's contest for 1955's best work of "science-fiction." The many who liked Alfred Bester's THE DEMOLISHED MAN (Shasta) will undoubtedly like this suspense novel. The purists, however, may just possibly protest that PREFERRED RISK is masquerading as a science fiction novel except during the few and rather hurried moments when Tom Wills hunts through the Company's deep-freeze vaults where they keep the "incurably ill"—from the Company's viewpoint as well as medically speaking—in a state of suspended deterioration while awaiting a possible future cure. Tom's final realization of what the Carmody Company, which controls the entire world, has really become—and what he does about it—makes for fast-moving reading.

JOHN WYNDHAM explored, in RE-BIRTH (Ballantine, 35 cents), the potentialities of man in a post-

If a book reviewer is truly wise he'll take lessons from those sturdy jousters of old who wooed their ladies fair with all the trappings of chivalry at their command. By absorbing their generosity before becoming forthright and realistic just the right balance can the more readily be attained. And Mr. Santesson, we're convinced, has done just that, in this month's scintillating summary.

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is literate, sensitive and intelligent Science Fiction at its best! In addition to Dikty's excellently edited anthology, there is Earl Kemp's definitive "Science Fiction Book Index," a complete listing of Science Fiction and related titles published in the English language during 1954, and Dikty's introduction, "The Science Fiction Year," a complete annual survey of the world of science-fiction.

Recommended—Tom Godwin's *"The Cold Equations."* Man hadn't chosen the law. It had been made imperative by the circumstances of the space frontier. How did Marylin Lee Cross face this? Arthur Porges' *"Guilty as Charged."* Why was Frances Wills burned to ashes? Walter M. Miller's excellent *"Memento Homo"* and his equally good *"The Will."* Who was it who answered, "Come, liddle boy. Ve fix"? Robert Abernathy's *"Heirs Apparent."* If people live in towns, sooner or later the bombers come, "many are killed and others sickened with burns and bowels turning to water; the death blows even across the steppes and kills animals and men . . . We cannot allow you to live in such danger. So we will burn this town." Raymond E. Banks' *"The Littlest People"* and his excellent *"Christmas Trombone."* "Now they came back to him, those golden, unforgettable 45 seconds; solo, nothing added, nothing taken away." There was no need to play any more . . .

In other words—*run,* don't just walk, to the nearest bookstore, if you don't already have Ted Dikty's excellent THE BEST SCIENCE FICTION STORIES AND NOVELS: 1955!

A major luminary in the science fantasy firmament writes of cosmic vampires on a planet of mystery and dire repute

THE SKAG CASTLE

By ROBERT SHECKLEY

in the next FANTASTIC UNIVERSE

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young man with a trumpet

by . . . Frank Belknap Long

The animals did the best they could with what they had. But a certain rare talent for the magnificent was missing until—

WHEN Man left Earth forever the animals still carried on proudly.

They knew, of course, that they could never hope to equal the Great One's shining accomplishments. But even the wart-hog and the lowly cricket were determined to avoid his mistakes and the tragic impulsiveness which had led to his defeat on a battleground of his own choosing.

It may seem surprising to some, but what they missed most of all was music. It was more the pity because animals in general have an excellent idea of pitch and can swing and sway in quite miraculous fashion to nature's inimitable rhythms.

They finally decided that something should be done about it. So they went into a huddle and came up with an astounding interrogative aphorism: *Why not try?*

The leading spirit in this conclave of daring was, of course, the ass. He stood up on his hindlegs and gave went to a tremendous bray. This was the more remarkable because—unlike his far less intelligent cousin, the horse—the ass has little talent for vocal improvisation.

If you've read Orwell's ANIMAL FARM *and the delightful little fantasies by Dal Stivens—the latter an exclusive* FANTASTIC UNIVERSE *presentation—you'll know that animals quite frequently "go it on their own" in truly amazing fashion. And here comes Frank Belknap Long with a whimsically delectable and prophetic confirmation of this, guaranteed to make you gasp in wonderment.*

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It was a most commendable effort but it failed dismally. A bray is not music. It may have some of the qualities of music, but a single chord, however magnificently sustained, does not make for rapture on a tonal plane.

In fact, regrettable as it may seem, the fox and the wart-hog held their ears, the skunk exuded an unforgivably unpleasant effluvium, and the prairie dog darted like a streak of midsummer lightning into his burrow.

The wolf tried next. His howl was distinctly on the ferocious side and it contributed nothing to the pleasures of the moment, even though there was an undercurrent of primitive amorousness in it which should have delighted the females of his species.

"You'll have to do better than that!" the crocodile said, a comment which could have been put down to pure masculine pique, for the crocodile is notoriously sluggish in his mating habits.

The bullfrog tried next, as if to prove that, while not exactly hairy-chested, he was in all respects the exact opposite of the crocodile. The cacophony of croakings which emanated from his throat was undeniably impressive, but a tone-poem with a buzzsaw accompaniment is, at best, a contradiction in terms.

"Heard melodies are sweet, but those unheard are sweeter," quoted the wart-hog, his uncouth swiftness-on-the-trigger debasing the lines with an ironic implication never intended by Keats.

"A legacy of song and story as impressive as Man's should be the exclusive heritage of the elite," said the Hornbill, with a patronizing, scholarly vanity.

His own contribution was a tragic flop. It was artificial and stilted, and it provoked the hyena to gales of laughter. Almost instantly the hyena realized that he had betrayed himself, and could have bitten his tongue out. He had intended to improvise out of character, with a melodious persuasiveness, but the laughter was accepted by everyone as an ordeal that had to be endured and could now be dismissed as a *fait accompli.*

"I'm glad that's over," breathed the Spoonbill, and went into a solo that made even the Hornbill shudder, despite their undoubted kinship as members of a team whose erudition and bald-domed superiority could not be challenged.

It was now the turn of the big cats. The less said about their roars the better. The lion's was fiercely belligerent, the tiger's playful and beguiling, for contrary to popular belief the tiger is an amiable beast. But how could such formidable vocalisms conjure up visions Mozartian?

Then it happened. A small, wiry figure arose and without even awaiting his turn lifted to his lips an incredible instrument of sound. It was fashioned of brass, and it flared at its tip like an earphone—

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the earphone of some pitifully ancient individual who has lost all touch with reality, and thinks of sound as a crutch.

But the instrument was neither an earphone nor a crutch. The fox with his native sagacity and the Hornbill with his learning and knowledge of prehistory recognized it for what it was.

It was a trumpet, and—it was golden. It never had been brass except in a wearisome literal sense which did not matter at all. So golden indeed was it that there came from it now, like a banner resplendently unfurled, an incomparable salute to the dawn.

Never had man dared to dream of such music. It was as if Ulysses, lashed to his mast, had burst his bonds at last, and was with swift breast strokes approaching the island of his heart's-desire.

For this was siren music. This was the music of the spheres. It was the music almost of Man dying young—Shelley in the blue Mediterranean, Bix Beiderbecke in canyons of steel, his last high imperishable note winging its way into the blue infinite.

Almost, but not quite, it was Man music. By dint of long, patient practice it had simply taken on those shadings of absolute perfection—the "little more"—that are the hallmarks of genius in its lonely and solitary pilgrimage under the stars.

Was it Eddington who first affirmed that if you set a monkey to pounding on a typewriter through all eternity he will eventually write Hamlet or King Lear? The statement has since found innumerable supporters who have paraphrased it in one way or another.

But this was not Shakespeare. This was music, sensuous and unadorned.

The monkey lowered his horn, and stood very still and straight and proud while thunderous applause echoed and re-echoed through the glade and the star-bright meadows beyond.

He had known all along that he could do it.

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the cybernetic kid

by . . . John Jakes

A child genius is like an atomic acorn. He can grow into a sturdy oak, or blow the lid off generally.

PTUI! went the old-fashioned pea-shooter.

"Wow!" exclaimed Sailor Burns, massaging his knobby dome once so familiar to habitues of the system-wide wrestling telecasts. The Sailor's usually cheery expression disappeared, to be replaced by a complete and rapturous stare of puzzled dullness.

"Will you for Pete's sake quit yelling?" snapped Mr. Fred Ajax, removing his cigar from his lips. "If I don't figure out an angle pretty soon, the creditors are going to heave us into the nearest penal institution."

Ptui! repeated the deadly weapon.

"Zowie!" ejaculated the Sailor, more out of surprise than pain.

This homely scene was enacted early one morning in the city park as Mr. Fred Ajax and his associate were on their way to their place of business, Ajax Enterprises. What they were going to do when they arrived was a mystery to Ajax.

The Sailor did not trouble his head about such abstract considerations.

Ajax's most recent invention, the Skin-of-Delight lamp, had run

When a science-fantasy writer with a bent for stark realism—remember John Jakes' chillingly somber DIRGE FOR THE SANE?*—lifts a child prodigy to his shoulders and goes prancing about with chuckles of high glee we're left a little stunned. But somber or joyous, a Jakes yarn has a magic all its own!*

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its course of popularity, leaving the business, to say the least, almost broke. Monthly bills had completed the annihilation.

As the second missile connected with the Sailor's dome, causing him to cry out, Ajax stopped dead in the gravel path. "What's wrong with you?" he demanded. "It's too early in the year for mosquitoes."

Perplexed, the Sailor replied, "I dunno, Fred. Something's been hitting my head." The Sailor appeared sad. "It hurts."

"I'm amazed," Ajax replied with a slight shade of sarcasm in his tone. He looked into the shrubbery on both sides of the path. "Aha! There's the trouble, I'll bet."

The trouble happened to be a small boy of around eight, with crew-cut hair and large glasses which magnified his eyes to peculiar proportions. He was watching our friends with a smirk of fiendish pleasure on his face, all the while waving his pea-shooter in derision. The lower half of his body was concealed by a shrub.

The lad uttered a loud raspberry.

Ajax put his hands on his hips, screwed up the side of his mouth and leered. "Come here, kid." The boy hesitated, his face losing its air of jolly hellishness. The Sailor blinked, not understanding his companion's severe manner. "I said come here," intoned Ajax with a gangsterish cast to his features.

The boy was clearly trained to obey his elders. With a sad, reluctant face he stepped from the bushes and came toward the two, scuffing his oxfords on the gravel of the path.

"I was only seeking a little relaxation," the youth exclaimed woefully. "Surely you can't blame me for that!"

Ajax, taken aback, nevertheless grinned and stuck out his hand. "Put her there, sonny. I'm not sore. I just wanted to get you out of those bushes to congratulate you."

"*Congratulate* him!" howled the Sailor. "For beaning me?"

"Quiet, you," hissed Ajax to his burly friend. The Sailor sank deep into his noisy sport coat. "Sonny," Ajax continued to the boy, who was beaming again, "you are the first person who has ever been able to make a dent in my friend's dome, outside of Four-arms Fogerty, the Venusian Terror. But that was years ago in the wrestling business."

"I am extremely happy that my antics pleased you," the boy replied. He cast anxious looks up and down the path.

"What's the matter, kid?" Sailor Burns asked confidentially. "They after you for pinching the baby-sitter?"

"Nothing as ridiculous as that," the boy said. "However, I regret to say that I am being more or less pursued."

"Don't your folks want you to play in the park?" Ajax asked, puffing deeply on his fragrant cigar.

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"Not my parents," the lad answered. "My guardian."

"Oh," replied Ajax, pushing the subject no further.

"He was a colleague of my father's, only I do not happen to find him congenial. I do not mind intellectual activity, in fact I find it refreshing, but a strict diet of that sort of thing is not healthy. My guardian refuses to let me indulge in childish play, and so I am forced to use deception."

"Sneak out on the bas . . . him, huh?" the Sailor grinned.

The boy nodded. "Exactly. I confess I was disturbed by the glimmer in this large gentleman's orbs when I propelled my missiles in his direction, but I trust that all has been forgiven."

"Sure," the Sailor said heartily. "I was ready to bust you in the orbs, too, but I ain't mad any more. I get what you're driving at. This guardian of yours won't let you go to the depthies on Saturday afternoon or play baseball with the kids, huh?"

"No," the lad replied. "He insists I keep in strict practice for my career."

"Career!" Ajax exclaimed. "How old *are* you?"

"Seven," was the piping reply.

"And what's this career?"

"Oh," replied the youth offhandedly, "I'm a genius."

Suffice to say that it would not have taken a loaded sandbag to knock Fred Ajax into a horizontal position on the path. Since the boy aroused his curiosity and there was nothing waiting for him at the office of Ajax Enterprises except perhaps creditors, he soon found himself seated on a park bench with the boy, learning more of his peculiar background.

The Sailor sprawled on the grass, intellectually lost but spiritually interested.

The boy's name was Dennis Ogg. His father had been Professor of Mathematics at Harvard and Venusburg Universities, and Dennis seemed to accept the fact that a tragic accident during a rocket trip back to Earth on vacation had caused his parents' death. It appeared that Dennis had a mind that could encompass the most complicated mathematical and philosophical problems as easily as normal children understood nursery rhymes.

At three Dennis had dismissed Einstein of the last century as "kindergarten stuff." At six he had completed requirements for entrance into Harvard University but a frantic directors' board had turned thumbs down at the last moment, envisioning a tot in shorts toddling across the campus, smirking smugly after having confounded the leading lights of learning in the institution.

"In fact," Dennis told them, "my guardian has often placed me in competition with one of the largest electronic brains on Venus. I find it fascinating sport. I have even broken one record set by that

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big brain for solving a complicated problem."

"You . . ." Ajax gasped. "You're kidding me."

"I wish I were," Dennis Ogg replied, a trace of sadness in his voice. "I sometimes think it would be a lot of fun to be a dope."

"You mean you race them cy . . . cy . . ." Sailor Burns sputtered.

"Cybernetic," Ajax assisted.

"Yeah, cybernetic. You race them cybernetic things—and *beat* 'em?"

"Every time," Dennis replied wistfully.

Illumination from heaven struck Fred Ajax. "Ah!" he chorused. "*Ah!*" He surged to his feet. "Dennis, how would you like to have some fun? How would you like to be in a *real* race, with an audience and everything?"

"Audience?" Dennis replied, blinking behind the large glasses. "I'm not sure that I quite understand."

"You're fogging me, too," the Sailor said mournfully.

"Here's the setup," Ajax said rapidly, visions of gleeful creditors who nipped at his heels dancing in his thoughts.

"Aha! There you are, Dennis!"

This stern exclamation came from the lips of a seedy individual who had just stuck his bowlered head through the shrubbery. The rest of his frame followed in jerky succession. He carried a rolled-up umbrella and wore pince-nez glasses. He was prim and haughty, and Ajax did not particularly like his looks. Ajax immediately identified him as the guardian.

"Dennis!" exclaimed the seedy individual, shaking his umbrella and frowning sternly. "Who are these persons?"

"And who the hell are you, getting so nosey?" the Sailor growled belligerently. He towered over the other man, causing a flinching response which was counteracted by a defiant curl of the lip.

"My name is Ellsworth Cranch. I happen to be the guardian of this boy."

"Pin a rose on me," growled the Sailor. "I think I'll bust you in the orbs."

Feigning unconcern, Cranch said to Dennis, "I warned you that I would take stern measures if you continued to disobey me by sneaking out of the apartment. I—"

Ajax put on a placating air. "Now, now, Mr. Cranch. Dennis was just telling us how much he enjoyed working with you. He was telling us all about his mental gymnastics, you might call it."

Cranch's face became less suspicious. This speech by Ajax caused Dennis to frown as if faith had been shattered, but a wink from Ajax which Cranch could not see restored it.

Cranch fumbled with his frayed string tie. "He's . . . been telling how I'm training him, eh?"

"Yes, sir! A brilliant piece of work! Brilliant."

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"Well! Hem! I wouldn't say—although I will admit, Dennis has a splendid future ahead of him, if he is properly handled."

"I agree. He was also telling us that he has been in competition with a cybernetic brain on Venus, and solved problems more rapidly than the machine was able to do."

"Quite right," Cranch replied.

"Have a cigar," Ajax effused. "Here's my card, too. Ajax Enterprises." The confusion of paraphernalia thrust upon Cranch gave Ajax time to press his point home. "It appears to me, Mr. Cranch, that the public would be interested in a boy like Dennis. Why, I think they'd pay *money* to watch him beat a big brain. Culturally, you know," Ajax went on, spinning something out of nothing, "mankind is getting rather worried about the superiority of machines. It would be refreshing to see a mere lad who could make a monkey out of a mechanical contraption."

"What is all this talk about the public?" Cranch scowled. "The 'public' has never fostered genius."

"But everybody likes kids," the Sailor put in helpfully.

Ajax ran his eyes suggestively over Ellsworth Cranch's frayed lapels. "Tell me, Cranch old boy. How's the take? Managing a genius, I mean. A good racket?"

"Racket? I don't— ah! Well—hem—Mr.—Ajax is it? I confess that the financial aspect is rather discouraging. The small fund which Dennis' father left for his care has almost run out, and I have always considered myself too talented a man to stoop to labor in the market place."

"Haw!" ejaculated the Sailor.

Ajax nudged him to silence, scowling venomously. "Here is my proposition," he said to Cranch. Although it was decidedly important from the aspect of his pocketbook, Ajax added casually, "You can take it or leave it. I have plenty of other enterprises to hold my attention, but such a project interests me. Also, it would give you a chance to gain cash to further Dennis' education."

Ajax went on to outline his scheme. He concluded, "For the services of Dennis for one week, plus the investment of the remainder of the fund money, you would collect fifty percent of the profits, which I am sure would be enormous."

Cranch scratched his angular chin. "It—it *would* be better than working," he said, as if in meditation.

"Psst!"

Dennis was shaking Ajax's sleeve. He motioned Ajax down to his level and whispered so that Cranch could not hear: "I have *my* conditions also."

"Spill it," Ajax whispered furtively.

"All the pop I want to drink, and promise that the Sailor will take me to Western depthies when

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I'm not performing and that Mr. Cranch won't interfere."

"Done," Ajax replied.

The face of Dennis Ogg lit with a jubilant smile.

"Mr. Ajax," Cranch announced suddenly, "I'll take you up on your offer. Mind you, I do not think it is proper and correct, but in view of the condition of my personal finances, I will agree. Shall we go to your office to discuss the matter more fully?"

"Why certainly—er, no, let's stay right here in the park. It's a beautiful day." Visions of greedy creditors camping on the doorstep danced through the mind of Fred Ajax.

The Sailor nudged Cranch, who recoiled. "You ought to unbend a little, buddy," the Sailor informed him. "You ever been boozed up?"

"Boozed—*up?*" The eyebrows of Ellsworth Cranch elevated in unison with his last word. "Certainly not."

The Sailor slapped him on the back, nearly causing Cranch to collapse. "We'll fix that too, eh, buddy?"

"Well, I—"

Ajax saved the situation. "To business!" he exclaimed, and herded a leering Sailor, a doubtful Cranch and a beaming Dennis toward the peanut vendor's stand, where they could obtain some slight refreshment before dipping into the various considerations related to the coming battle of man (better—boy) versus machine.

Fred Ajax was more than busy during the following days. Ellsworth Cranch presented him with slightly over five hundred dollars cold cash with which to begin operations. Ajax had steered through dangerous waters on this point, keeping Cranch, who was a novice in such matters anyway, so much in the dark that he never thought to ask why Ajax could not use some of his own cash, which was non-existent.

Ajax paid one hundred dollars rental on a vacant lot for a period of one week. He paid one hundred dollars to have a large tent erected for a period of one week. He paid three hundred dollars for a small Cybernetic Calculator rented out by the day to business firms with a special and complicated mathematical problem to solve.

This was a service of a company only recently established in the city, a company which had sprung up like similar companies all across the system after the electronic antics of the big brains became feasible on a small basis.

The Sailor, Ajax, and a sweating Ellsworth Cranch erected a small shack at one end of the tent while the workmen moved the brain machine into the other end. Dennis, unbeknownst to his guardian, was gorging himself on Orange-dee-lite pop at the rear of the lot. In the print shop of Ajax Enterprises where advertising was produced for the occasional inventions of the

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firm, posters rolled from the presses:

Boy vs. Machine! Dennis Ogg, the Seven-year-old Genius! See Him Solve Problems Faster Than a Cybernetic!

Though Dennis had a slight bellyache from too much Orange-dee-lite on opening day, things went more than smoothly. Video-sheets had been intrigued by the peculiar nature of the exhibition and had given it a guffawing play-up. The first "show" was at noon. Only a trickle of customers was on hand. But after three more shows, every hour on the hour, admission one dollar per person, the tide began to swell.

The procedure was thus:

Fred Ajax appeared before the standing spectators, microphone in hand. On one side of him was the crude shack, on the other the electronic brain with its banks of switches and lights, looking malignantly perfect. Aha! exclaimed Ajax, man triumphs over technology! A mere boy et cetera, et cetera, proves that man is not doomed to be subjugated by his own creations, et cetera, et cetera. Then Dennis appeared, herded by Ellsworth Cranch who wore a faded and frayed suit of tails. Cranch himself, an expert on such things, drew up the problem.

An official of the company renting the small electronic brain was on hand to verify that it was not fixed in any manner, shape or form. Ajax gave Dennis a ream of paper, several pencils and a copy of the problem. Dennis advanced to the door of the shack. Ajax, melodramatically, fired a blank cartridge pistol into the air and Dennis darted into the shack.

The lights on the brain began to wink and flash as the official fed the problem into it. The Sailor put the *Gay Pariesienne* on the phonograph and its frenetic strains dinned through the tent.

Strangely enough the suspense became monumental. At the end of thirty-five minutes, when the nerves of the patrons were frayed by the dinning of the can-can music, Dennis burst from the shack, waving a sheet of paper.

"I've got it!" he cried, having been coached by Ajax.

A cheer went up from the crowd.

The electronic brain finished the problem in forty-eight minutes. Both Dennis and the brain had the same correct answer.

The audience, amazed, was allowed to clap for a bowing Dennis and then was directed out to make room for the next group. And at the end of the day, a triumphant Ajax counted slightly under twenty-five hundred paid admissions. The race of boy versus machine was a success.

Certain improvements in the pitch were inevitable.

A larger electronic brain was rented to replace the small model. In view of the fact that certain patrons might suspect chicanery,

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the front wall of the shack was knocked out and replaced with glass during the night so that patrons could watch Dennis seated at a wooden table with his pencil flying over the paper. The shack was painted white and decorated at Sailor's suggestion by a sign reading, *Quiet! Genius at Work.*

Chairs were installed for the patrons to sit upon. A refreshment stand was installed and vendors hawked balloons, souvenir photos of Dennis, (autographed) and all sorts of drinks such as Orange-dee-lite and Galaxy Beer. It may be noted that the Sailor, out of some fiendish quirk of personality, was constantly plying Ellsworth Cranch with bottles of Galaxy Beer, but the latter would not relent.

Electric lights were hung from the tent. The videosheets now acknowledged the talents of Dennis Ogg. *A spectacular show!* they proclaimed. And the audiences were capacity, and the green flowed in like water, and all was right with the world to the tune of a second week. Ajax kept Ellsworth Cranch busy during the off hours going over financial matters, and Cranch, in lip-smacking approval of his cut, did not bother to reflect on the whereabouts of Dennis, who was whooping it up with the Sailor in the third row at the local depthie house.

Another inevitable result of the exhibition was the interest of men from Earth's centers of learning. During the first few days they scoffed. Then they read the reports in the videosheets and came to stand skeptically in the back row. Then, at the beginning of the second week, the spokesman for the group, Dr. Heinz Hockelbach of a noted eastern university approached Ajax.

"We challenge this boy!" Dr. Hockelbach exclaimed, waving his index finger at Dennis who was hiccupping noisily from too much Orange-dee-lite. "On Venus, perhaps. On Earth, never! We are certain that he cannot defeat the mammoth electronic brain Egbert IX from our university."

"Egbert IX!" breathed Ellsworth Cranch in awe.

Ajax massaged his palms against one another. "Dr. Hockelbach, next Saturday is our last day here. *We* will challenge *you.* One performance, five dollars per person, Dennis Ogg against Egbert IX."

"I don't care about the money," Hockelbach said in an inflammatory manner. "It is preposterous to assume that a mere boy can outwit a mechanical brain I personally have spent twenty-five years helping to develop."

"We'll see," Ajax smiled.

"This Egbert IX sounds pretty tough," the Sailor said ominously. "Can you do it, Dennis?"

Owlishly from behind his large glasses Dennis grinned. "I—*hic*—absolutely can, podner."

Fortunately, the worldly influences which had been recently op-

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erating upon his sensitive nature were not recognized at the moment by Cranch. That person was contemplating the ceiling of the tent and sighing, "At five dollars per person—"

"Make it ten," Ajax replied expansively.

"Ten dollars per person!" rhapsodized Ellsworth Cranch.

"Can you do it, Dennis, boy?" the Sailor breathed.

"Impossible!" snapped Dr. Heinz Hockelbach.

"*Can* I! Wahoo, I'm a Sioux!"

And thus the Frankenstein of boy versus machine rolled on. Coast to Coast, planet to planet, the name of Dennis Ogg was on each pair of lips, the face of Dennis Ogg, pixilated and large-eyed, greeted each pair of orbs from out the videosheets and telecasts. Saturday sold out. Standing room only. Crowds jammed to the street. A brass band playing. Celebrities arriving. Helicopters landing.

Fred Ajax had never enjoyed such prosperity before.

But the best laid plans of mice and men, as an ancient Scot once said, often get bollixed up.

The performance was set for three o'clock in the afternoon. The problem, set up by Dr. Hockelbach, was designed to take the giant and malignant-looking Egbert IX slightly less than three hours to solve. At fifteen minutes until three, Fred Ajax was pacing back and forth behind the tent, nervously puffing on his cigar and glancing from time to time at his watch. Ellsworth Cranch was not present. But worse, neither was Dennis.

Ten minutes to three. Five minutes. The crowd murmured. The band played. And across the rear of the lot came running a frantic Sailor Burns, his face a picture of panic.

"Fred!" the Sailor blurted. "Fred! He's *gone!*"

"He's—*gone?* You mean Dennis is gone? You don't mean Dennis is gone, is that what you mean?"

"That's what I mean," mournfully declared the Sailor.

"But how! How! My grandmother, *how!* You were supposed to take him to the depthies and bring him back here at two-thirty!"

"We were at the depthies, all right," the Sailor declared. "A swell show, *Blood on the Prairie,* it was called, and—"

"Never *mind!*" Ajax roared in excruciating frenzy. "We'll be booted out of town or worse if Dennis doesn't show up. What happened?"

The Sailor gasped deeply and started his recital. "About two o'clock Dennis got up and said he wanted to go to the men's room. I said, okay, hurry back. I guess I should have gone along—he *was* feeling kind of sick—but I wanted to see the serial again, and—"

"Sick!" howled Ajax in a vision of disintegration. "Why was he sick?"

"I dunno," the Sailor confessed.

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"All we were eating was popcorn and chocolate bars and hot dogs with onions and piccalilli and mustard and cotton candy and Orange-dee-lite. I had twelve bottles, but Dennis beat me." The Sailor beamed. "He had fourteen."

"Since eleven o'clock this morning?" wailed Ajax.

"Yep."

"Oh, my God! No wonder he's sick. For two weeks he hasn't had anything to eat except popcorn and that damned insidious Orange-dee-lite. Well, what happened, did you just sit there? Didn't he come back?"

The Sailor related that Dennis had failed to return for twenty minutes, at which time, becoming curious rather than worried, the Sailor had gone into the lobby and asked if anyone had seen a boy resembling Dennis. Whereupon he was informed that said boy about twenty minutes before had made a trip to the men's room, had reeled back out as if intoxicated, and had continued to reel out of the theater as if he did not know which direction was up, down or otherwise.

"My God!" wailed Ajax. "Dennis is walking around the town drunk on Orange-dee-lite, and—"

"Mr. Ajax!" The voice of Dr. Heinz Hockelbach, followed by his body, came through the rear flap of the tent, frowning displeasure. "It is three o'clock. Egbert IX is ready to begin. Where is this Dennis Ogg?"

"He's not here," Ajax said sadly. "Look, Dr. Hockelbach, he's sick, couldn't we—"

Hockelbach stamped his foot. "No! My colleagues, in fact all of Terran science has been insulted by the precocity of this stripling. We will no longer be humiliated. Produce your Dennis Ogg. Make him un-sick. But Egbert IX begins the problem at once!" And turning on his angry heel, Hockelbach vanished.

Ajax mournfully threw his cigar to the ground. "Finished. Where would a boy like Dennis go if he was plas—er, sick from too much pop? Where? I don't know. And if we don't find him—"

The Sailor tapped his knobby dome. "Maybe the park, huh? Subconscious, huh? How about that?"

The mouth of Fred Ajax dropped open. "No time to lose!" he shouted, and raced pell mell across the lot, the Sailor in hot pursuit. As they headed for the nearest 'copter stand, thoughts whirled in the mind of Fred Ajax: The park! A place of release from good old guardian Cranch. Maybe? Brother, let's hope, or we're candidates for laughingstocks and we might as well go mine carbonates on Mars.

The moments that followed were sheer agony. At three-sixteen the 'copter set them down in the park. Fred Ajax immediately enlisted the aid of three policemen, but it so happened that the policemen were also hunting for Dennis.

Pandemonium had invaded the park that afternoon.

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A young boy described by all who came in contact with him as a Monster had been running berserk during the last hour, pelting people with peas from his pea-shooter, tripping fat ladies, crossing bridle paths, leaping over water fountains, walking on the grass when no walking was allowed, screeching, howling, scalping small girls with an imaginary tomahawk and hiccupping frantically.

At twenty minutes until four they found Dennis trying to swim the park lagoon. The unfortunate fact was that the lagoon had been drained of water that morning to facilitate cleaning.

Now the police wanted Dennis. But Fred Ajax and the Sailor tore him out of their grasp and there was another frantic chase along graveled paths, through grassy nooks and sylvan dells, until Ajax and company outdistanced the law and made it to the 'copter stand. The 'copter pilot was induced to swear off the stuff when he saw two grown men pinching the cheeks of an owl-eyed little boy and mumbling, "Sober up, sober up!" while they rolled their eyes frantically.

The 'copter set down back of the tent at ten minutes past four, and Egbert IX had seventy minutes head start.

Dennis reeled from the 'copter, more or less understanding Ajax's frantic pleas that he had a problem to solve, could not let them down, and so forth. Dennis blinked behind his large glasses.

"Can you do it, Dennis?" Ajax pleaded frantically.

Dennis cocked an eyebrow, weaved to and fro and pointed an index finger at Ajax. "Gimme a swig of Orange-dee-lite and I can do anything!"

"Orange-dee-lite!" Ajax said wildly to the Sailor. "Quick!"

The Sailor got a bottle from the refreshment stand and pressed it into Dennis' feverish hands. Dennis swigged. "I'm ready, boys," he said.

Ajax, mouthing supplications to the powers that be, held the tent flap aside. Dennis staggered inside on rubbery legs. The crowd gasped. Dennis bowed low, almost falling on his face, walked over and kicked the side of Egbert IX, snatched the problem sheet from the hands of a gape-jawed Dr. Heinz Hockelbach, kicked Hockelbach in the shins, and marched into the shack.

The rest is history.

At precisely five thirty-eight Dennis Ogg emerged with a sheaf of scribbled paper and loudly demanded a shot of Orange-dee-lite. At five forty-one Egbert IX came through with the same correct answer as Dennis had. But the machine was vanquished. To account for this phenomenon, Dennis himself told the videosheet reporters:

"The Orange-dee-lite stimulated me. It is an excellent beverage. I attribute my success to the lucid quality of my thought while under the influence of this liquid.

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The phenomenon strikes me as similar to the conditions under which Edgar Allan Poe purportedly composed much of his poetry. That is all I have to say. Let's all go have some Orange-dee-lite."

Monday, in the offices of Ajax Enterprises, a very sick Dennis Ogg groaned and held his stomach while reclining on the couch.

"I hope he's gonna be all right," the Sailor said dolefully. "He's sure a game little kid."

"The doctor said it was only a very severe stomach ache," Ajax told him.

Dennis groaned, blinked and sat up.

"How do you feel, Dennis?" Ajax asked, taking time off from counting up the semi-fortune he had made from his enterprise.

"Awful," Dennis said, trying to muster a grin. "But it's fun for a change. I'm going to hate going back to practicing to be a genius."

The Sailor and Ajax exchanged significant glances. Humorously smiling, Fred Ajax puffed his cigar. "I think your life will be a lot less strict from now on, Dennis. Your guardian has—shall we say—mellowed."

Dennis blinked behind his large glasses. "I don't understand."

"Ol' Cranch took the hint last Friday night," the Sailor said.

Ajax nodded. "Yes, he finally succumbed to the Sailor's bad influence."

"Where is he?" Dennis asked.

The Sailor opened the door to the outer office. "I wunnered when you boys were goin' to let me in," came the voice of Ellsworth Cranch.

"He arrived a few minutes ago," Ajax commented wryly. "Under his own power, amazingly enough."

Dennis gasped. Ellsworth Cranch had changed considerably. His clothing was rumpled. His bowler hat looked as if someone had punched a fist out through the crown. His pince-nez had disappeared. Around his neck hung one gaudy orange necktie, one artificial flower lei and one cardboard sign on a string, similar to those seen hanging on the walls of libation establishments, said sign reading, *Drink Galaxy Beer.*

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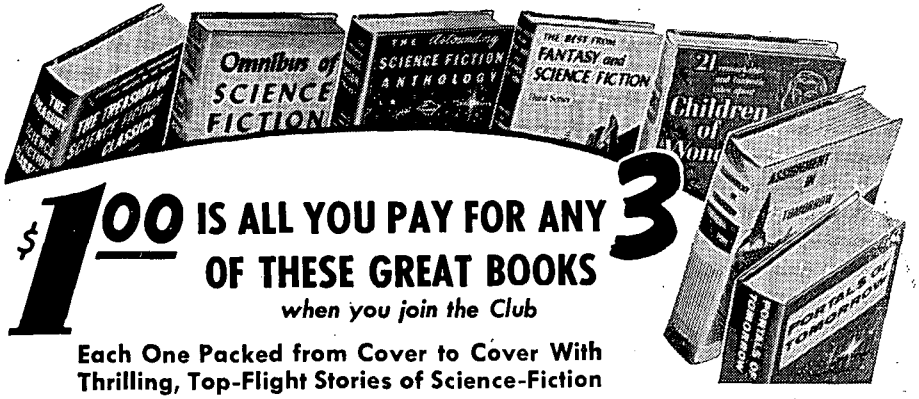
—Continued from Back Cover



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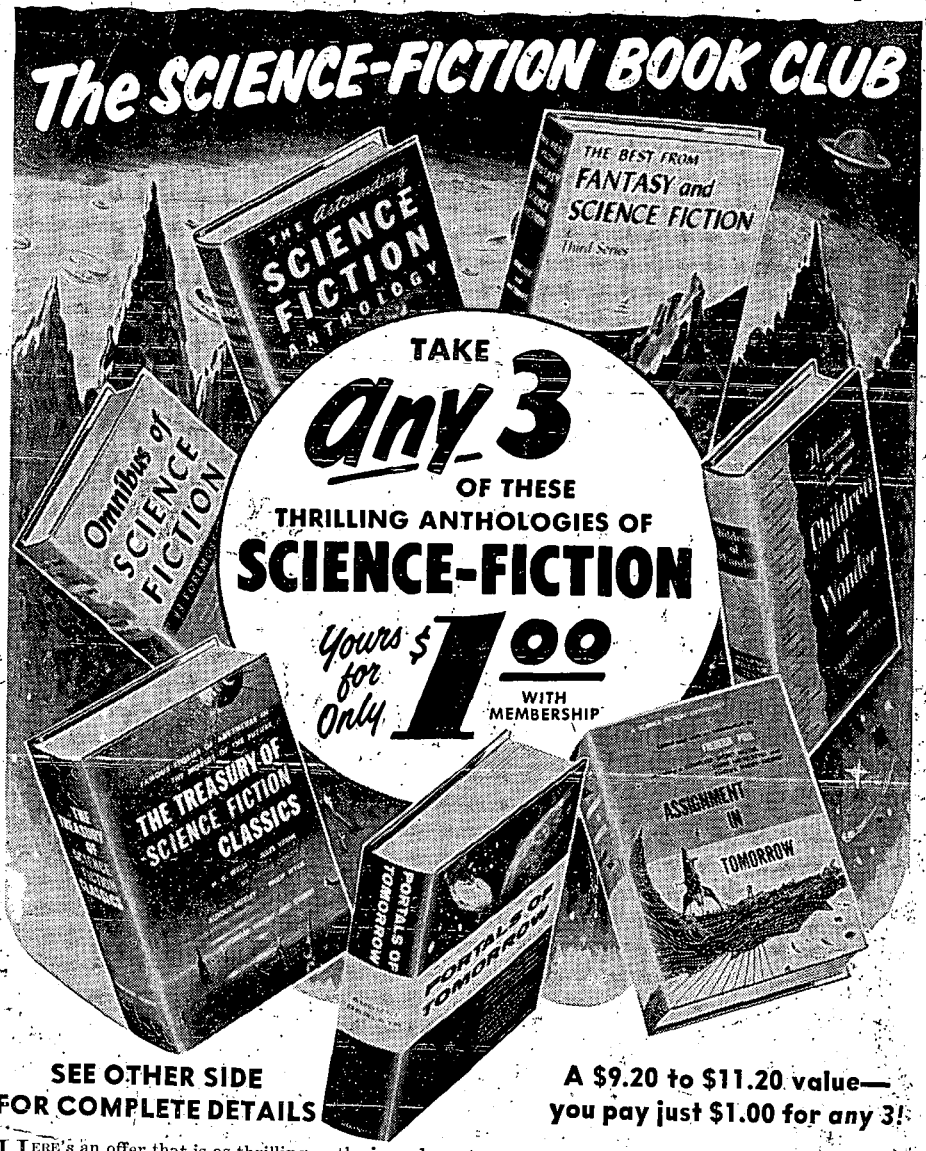
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